



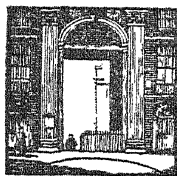
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# THE FRENCH AT HOME

IN THE COUNTRY AND IN TOWN

BY  
PHILIP CARR

WITH THIRTY-FOUR ILLUSTRATIONS



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\* ... of ... Co, London  
 ...  
 ... Paris  
 ... Paris

# THE FRENCH AT HOME

## CHAPTER I

### THE NATIONAL CHARACTER

WHEN the Englishman lands in France, he finds that the traffic goes to the right instead of to the left (except on the railways, but that is because the first one was built by British engineers, and it has been too complicated to change ever since); that the windows open inwards, instead of outwards or upwards, and that they all have shutters; that a town house is rather like a barracks, built around an inner courtyard, with separate families living on every floor except the ground, which is a shop, and that the whole place is closely guarded by a concierge; that nobody eats breakfast and every one goes home to lunch; that you sit down at a table for an hour over one drink, instead of leaning against a counter for five minutes over several, and that you take port before dinner, sweets after the cheese, and champagne with the fruit—or else in the middle of the afternoon on ceremonial occasions.

When he has gone a little farther, the traveller will realize that most of these and the many other superficial peculiarities which could be noted are not merely differences between his own country and France, but between the British Isles and the whole continent of Europe. He may even discover that the continental unanimity in the planning of a house, in the general appearance of a town, and in certain habits of daily life represents traces of a

Roman civilization which have long been effaced in England.

His next step will probably be to recognize that, after all, there are certain points of resemblance between France and England; and it is here that he may be tempted into thinking that the French mind and character and habits can be judged by the same standards as his own.

They cannot. It is not only the things which appear to be different which are different, but many of the things which appear to be the same.

Even the words are deceptive. There are so many which are almost identical in the two languages, but which stand for different meanings, that a learned lexicographer has managed to collect fifteen hundred such words and has published them in a special dictionary. Some of the differences are fairly obvious, and the young woman who announced, on her arrival in London during the war, that she was a *nourrice* among the *gens militaires* doubtless soon found out why the declaration raised a smile. Yet even the professional interpreters at the international conferences which are now so common have taken a long time to discover that 'control', 'ignore', 'qualified', 'investiment', 'assume', 'document', 'commodity' cannot safely be rendered by '*contrôler*', '*ignorer*', '*qualifié*', '*l'investissement*', '*assumer*', '*document*', '*commodité*'; while in translation of literary works one still constantly finds '*brutaliser*', '*pupille*', '*ostensible*', '*admirer*', '*parade*', '*fastidieux*', merely transcribed into the almost identical words in English, which have quite other meanings.

As for the things which do not appear to be the same, the chief obstacle to an Englishman's understanding of them is that the real differences, profound as they are, between the two national characters are hardly over what British prejudice and tradition have taught him to believe them to be.

The typical Frenchman is not frivolous, he is not immoral, he is not idle, he is not dishonest, and he does wash.

To be sure, he is gay. His capacity for merriment is one of the most delightful of his characteristics, and that largely because, even when it is expressed in a wit which is intellectually subtle, it is in its elements so childlike. What more typically French, for instance, than the joy of all classes, and, more especially, of all ages, in the circus and the country fair? This gaiety, however, does not exclude seriousness. It may even be compatible with a certain pessimism—as that of Anatole France, who drew a distinction between himself, pessimist and gay, and his father, optimist and grave. It does not exclude industry and persistence, as is proved, on the one hand, by the monuments of painstaking work which have been left by intellectuals, and on the other by the fierce and laborious energy of the tillers of the soil. It is true that the Frenchman likes to work quickly on things that can be done quickly, and his readiness to give immediate vocal expression to momentary impatience may easily belie his tenacity; but his industrious tirelessness is phenomenal. One might even say that it is sometimes excessive, and that it prompts him to spend time on details which an Englishman would regard as unessential, and to prepare plans with an elaboration which an Englishman would regard as unpractical.

The ancient British charge of the Frenchman's immorality is perhaps partly based on the kind of play which is still—though to a diminishing degree—most common in the Paris boulevard theatres, and partly on the fact that every Frenchman likes to create the impression that he is the devil of a fellow, and even when he cannot hope to succeed in that object, delights in talking about excesses in which he



has no sort of intention of indulging, and he has probably never indulged. Moreover the Frenchman considers it quite natural to sit at the dinner-table and in mixed company, to tell the stories which the Englishman reserves for his smoking-room, and there is a verbal flirtation between the sexes which is quite unknown in England, the Englishman draws conclusions from these things which are really false. What an Englishman can be decent reticence the Frenchman would call prudery—not to say hypocrisy. He has no ideas of decency, moreover, and is as shocked at a public, if quite innocent, embrace to be seen in a street or park in London as the Englishman is at what he hears in Paris.

Of course the Frenchman is no anchorite, as being no Puritan, and the precautions which his wife takes to see that he has no liberty to go out are no doubt an indication of what he would do if he were free. The fact that he submits to these precautions, however, shows that he is really a domestic creature indeed. He is domestic with his wife, but he is almost as domestic when he is with a lady who is not his wife. There is no way to prevent his leaving her when he likes, and the French ones do so; but his more usual attitude, even when he wants to go, is that of the man who considers that 'the worst of these irregular unions is that there is no legal machinery for bringing them to a close.'

The Frenchman's attitude towards serious morality and towards comic stories about sexual immorality is much the same as the Englishman's attitude towards drunkenness and comic stories about drunkenness; and if it is possible to prove it by no means proved—that there is more sexual immorality in France than in England is certainly more drunkenness in England than in France. You remember the anecdote

roisterer, who confided to his friend between the hiccoughs that he had promised his doctor to abandon this life of wine, women, and song, and that this week he was giving up singing. Well, the Frenchman would have started renunciation at the other end of the scale—though he would probably think it rather unreasonable to give up even wine, which he produces in enormous quantities, and drinks regularly without ever getting drunk on it.

I am not going to pretend that Frenchmen are never dishonest. There is plenty of commercial dishonesty in Paris, and it has increased since the war ; but I doubt whether there is more of it than there is in other big towns in Europe and America. Moreover, there are two things to be said about honesty in France. One is that if a Frenchman thinks little of breaking a verbal promise and not so very much of giving a misleading verbal assurance, he takes very seriously anything about which he has put pen to paper. The other is that it is the small man who stands high in honesty and honour. It is not among the poor that are to be found most of the bribery, blackmail, political corruption, and shameless fraud. The little shopkeeper and the artisan can nearly always be trusted, and so generally can the peasant ; for though he is incredibly grasping, he has a determined self-respect which keeps him from endangering his reputation.

It cannot be denied that your Frenchman will talk, but his talk is not a substitute for action. It is a preparation for it. He talks, like most of us, in order to find out what he thinks ; but he needs to do so more than most of us, for, before he can act, he must have an opinion and a plan. He cannot proceed empirically. He talks also because he is incorrigibly critical, and it is perhaps partly because his talk is critical that the average Englishman dislikes it. That dislike represents the mistrust of the

man, who instinctively feels his way, for the theorist, who requires a logical justification for every step; it represents the contempt of the taciturn for the verbose; but it also represents, I fancy, a certain envy of the inarticulate for the eloquent.

Equally suspicious to the Englishman, because he is incapable of it, is the Frenchman's entire absence of social awkwardness. It is perhaps because the Frenchman is never self-conscious and is always capable of being natural that the Englishman begins to doubt whether he is not using his accomplished ease to be constantly artificial. In every class, in town and country, you will find this ease. A democratic and secure sense of complete social as well as political equality has something to do with it; but the social freedom is older than the Revolution. It was already part of the French character in the time of Molière.

The amazing thrift which is one of the greatest of the French virtues can hardly be understood by an Englishman, and will never be understood unless it is realized that, fiercely individual as the Frenchman may be against all the world, and fiercely individual as he may even be against the members of his own family, it is the interest of his family that comes before any personal interest whatever. It is nearly always for the family, which in practice means his heirs, that he screws and scrapes.

This passionate family feeling is largely the creation of women. Although wives have no legal existence apart from their husbands, and although women have no political existence at all, the wife and mother is a determining force in the social, and even in the industrial and commercial life of the country, as great as the husband and father.

There is the other side of the medal. Thrift carried to excess sometimes becomes an avarice,

which is hardly credible to any one not a Frenchman, but seems quite natural to him, if he is a French peasant. More than half the peasantry live the lives of misers—hard-working misers, but misers nevertheless—and old women owning acres of land may be seen in rags picking up firewood in the forest. The motive of nearly all the crimes in the country is avarice, and it is the avarice of the victims which exposes them to attack, because they insist upon hoarding, under mattresses and in chimney cupboards, wealth that they will entrust to no bank.

Family feeling sometimes leads to vindictive and lifelong quarrels between families, and individual independence sometimes produces unforgiving separations between parents and their children, who may disappear, never to return to the home until they take possession of it after the father's death—for the law does not allow disinheriting. These quarrels, which also lead to the bitter litigiousness for which the Frenchman, and particularly the French peasant, is famous, nearly always have their beginning in some disagreement about money, often about a ridiculously small sum.

The private quarrels, the family quarrels, the political quarrels, and the national quarrels of the French are nearly always bitter and nearly always irreconcilable. The Frenchman, like the Scotsman, and in some respects the Irishman, has a long and relentless memory and none of the Englishman's capacity to forgive and forget. Indeed, he rather despises the Englishman for being able to do so. He is not in the least ashamed of confessing that he nourishes *une vieille rancune* towards any one, and that he always remembers an affront or an injury. He will even take a fierce pleasure in annoying some one who is not even his enemy, but merely a man whom he does not care about, and he will relate with

joy the tricks which he has played or is going to play *pour embêter* his victim.

Envy is at the root of much of this desire to annoy. The Frenchman is nearly always envious of any one who is richer, more successful, or more powerful than himself. The Englishman easily accepts an inferiority of wealth or social position. Not so the Frenchman. The peasant hates the *seigneur* in the château because he envies him. He does not respect him. The maidservant does not respect her mistress ; she envies her.

*Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité.* Those watchwords of the Revolution are on every public building in France—sometimes only imperfectly hiding the previous royal or imperial titles—and on every coin or greasy paper note. The only one of the three for which the Frenchman cares a rap is *Egalité*. The Englishman wants his liberty, and is quite prepared to let the rest go. As for fraternity, I am not sure who can be said to worry about that—unless it be the Russian, in spite of Bolshevism.

The Frenchman really does care passionately about equality, so passionately that it is difficult to understand how he stood an aristocracy for centuries, except that it was never an aristocratic Government, but an autocratic one, and he has always been ready for an autocracy, under which every one is equal.

Intellectually, the Frenchman's desire to have an opinion upon every subject inevitably leads to what he calls *snobisme*—not social snobism, of which, to his credit, he is almost entirely free, but the assumption of a factitious enthusiasm for literary and artistic theories, which he sometimes quite fails to understand, but which he adopts ready-made, with their shibboleths or clichés, in order to be sure not to be left behind at the second coming of any intellectual Messiah. This *snobisme*, by the way, is by no means peculiar to France.

A mental habit which is typically French is that which is described by the almost untranslatable word *dénigrement*. The excess of the critical faculty tends to make a Frenchman inclined to carp at everything. He will talk the most terrible scandal about friends of whom he may be quite fond. He will run down his Government, his institutions, and the national characteristics of his fellow-countrymen. To whatever class he may belong, his first instinct in new surroundings—whether he be a gardener taking up a job or a carpenter come to give an estimate—is to find fault with everything and to suggest how it ought to have been arranged differently. This habit, which is distressing until one gets used to it, sometimes leads foreigners to think less well of Frenchmen than they deserve, because they themselves speak so badly of themselves.

If he is accused of running everything down, the Frenchman will reply that one must look facts in the face—'*voir les choses comme elles sont*'—and he certainly never hesitates to call a spade the bloodiest of shovels. He will pride himself on having no illusions—wrongly, of course, for we all of us live on illusions—and will present a picture so dark that it would be despairing if he did not give the impression that, after all, he did not really believe that things were quite so black as he painted them.

Sometimes one suspects that this pessimism is not without its calculating side. As an individual the Frenchman acts up to his own motto that *il vaut mieux faire envie que pitié*, and does not hesitate to put his own merits and capacities well forward in the shop window. He rarely tries to excite commiseration for his fate. Nationally his attitude is not quite the same. He will indignantly declare that France has been hardly and unfairly treated; and it is only after such complaints have obtained generous international concessions and restored his

country to prosperity that he will discover and assert that France has saved herself by her own unaided efforts, and by *une sérénité bien française*. After that he will resume his criticism of his own people.

The critical intelligence of the French at its best is very far from mere fault-finding, and has a limpid clarity which is unmatched in the mind of any other people. Even at its best, however, it has its limits. The Frenchman is always reasoning and not often imagining, or rather his imagination—for he is characteristically an artist—always has a reasoning quality. Perhaps it would be more true to say that he is hardly ever dreaming. He is really interested only in what can be defined ; and as he has highly developed the art of getting the very best out of the material beauties and pleasures and sensations of life, he is often unfairly accused of caring only for the material side of it. A love of system, of generalizations, of abstract principles, makes the logic which is always working in every French mind almost entirely deductive. It gives to the Frenchman the tendency which he always has to take a legal view of any question, unless he takes an even more closely reasoned scientific view. It prevents him from trying in practice any expedient of which he has not first attempted to understand the principle, but it also prevents him from being vague and happy-go-lucky.

The Frenchman has been called impatient ; but the way in which he will stand browbeating by an official or will wait in a queue for the mere privilege of paying his taxes is among many examples of a long-suffering character which could not be found among nations with a reputation for being more phlegmatic. Naturally, there is a breaking point, and after that breaking point the Frenchman can protest very volubly, and can even, in the mass,

suddenly become dangerous. No doubt, also, he can be very rapidly impatient, in words, about quite small things. He has been called excitable. He often is, although the dogged persistence of the French peasant betrays excitement only in the fierce energy of his industry. If he is excitable the Frenchman recognizes that to be so is a fault, but he also considers it to be a fault which almost carries with it its own pardon. How often will you not hear the excuse: '*Il m'a mis hors de moi*', or '*Que voulez-vous? C'était plus fort que moi*'. He would hardly understand the Englishman's reply that he had no business to allow anything to be stronger than himself, for he certainly does not put self-control above the other virtues, and he is still prepared to admit that a crime of passion is a crime which, owing to its very nature, can claim forgiveness. Indeed, if once anger is passionate, the Frenchman is almost prepared to regard it as something admirable and generous, carefully to be distinguished from the cold, mean, and calculating anger of less lively peoples. He is vivacious, he is mercurial in merriment and in sudden depression, he is sometimes uncontrollably passionate; but these qualities, even when they become faults, are faults of vitality, and, if most of us are fond of the French, it is largely because they are so thoroughly alive, even as that very vitality makes others of an irreconcilably hostile temperament hate them.

Although he is not in the least sentimental as Englishman understand the word, the Frenchman is very susceptible to an appeal to his feelings; for he is kindly and tolerant, and will generally be ready to do a good turn to any creature, man or beast, who has succeeded in establishing a personal relation with him. For instance, he can be very fond of individual animals, though he can hardly be described as fond of animals in general.



He will be kinder still if the act of kindness can be performed with something of a flourish, for he is certainly vain. He does everything better if he can do it in the limelight. As a nation France is like a pretty woman, who expects to be flattered, and is not always above being spiteful. As an individual the Frenchman has a vanity which is far more agreeable, because it is far more simple and more childlike. Indeed, to those who find the French charming, that childlike vanity makes up a large part of the charm.

## CHAPTER II

### PARIS A PROVINCIAL TOWN

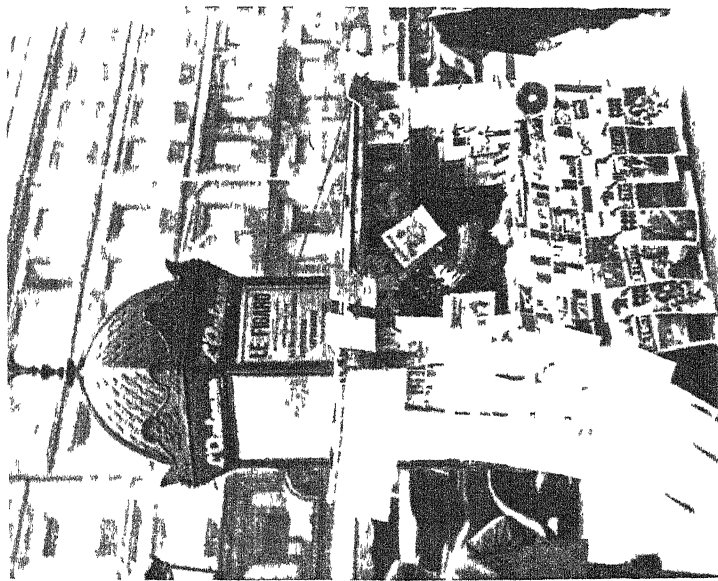
AS this is going to be a book about provincial France, I must begin by saying something about Paris.

This will seem to many people to be more of a paradox than I believe it really is. To realize that Paris is not France is to make a certain stage in the voyage of discovery into the character of the French people. To declare that it is not possible to generalize about France at all, for it is composed of so many widely different elements, is to make another. It is only later that the discoverer understands that at both these stages he had only perceived a half-truth.

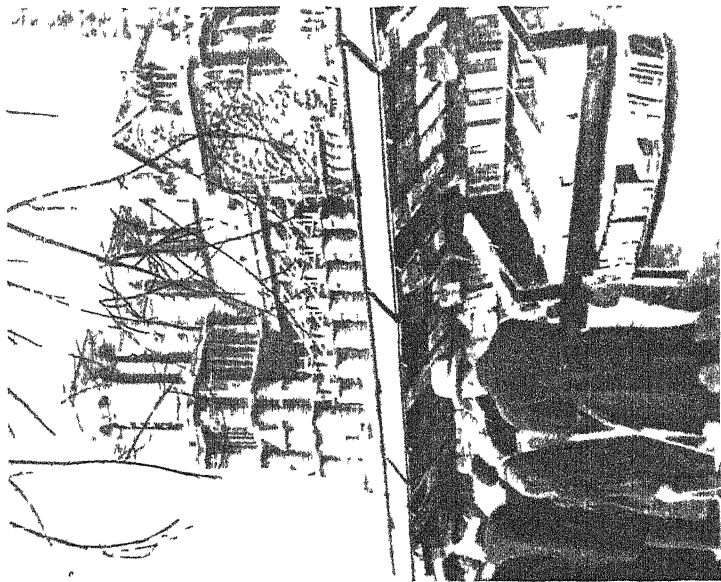
It may easily be maintained that the appreciation which I have attempted to make in the preceding chapter, even if it may be said to be true of any part of France, is quite untrue of all others. The Breton west ; the Flemish north ; the Pyrenees, last mountain refuge of so ancient and distinct a people as the Basques ; Provence, where obvious Greek and Roman and Saracen types can be found to this day ; Normandy, which was not only conquered by invaders from Scandinavia but was occupied and ruled for hundreds of years by England ; Bordeaux, where the English names of old French families show trace of a similar occupation—represent the widest divergencies of race and build and character and temperament. The very conscious local patriotisms of a Gascon, a Savoyard, an Auvergnat, a Franc-Comtois, an Orléanais, a Walloon, a Tourangeau, a Champenois, a Bourguignon, a Poitevin, a Lyonnais

express distinctions almost as marked, if they are not so fundamental. Provençal and Gaelic and Basque and Flemish are distinct languages, spoken by thousands of French subjects, and the Walloons and the Savoyards and the Corsicans are among the many who have their local dialects, to say nothing of the varieties of German and Italian and Spanish which are to be found in the territories bordering upon those foreign countries. There are the widest differences in social habits, in climate, in food and drink. I mean the food and drink of the common people, the wine and the almonds and the oil and the olives of the Midi, the beer of the Nord, the cheese and the cider of Normandy. The differences in temperament even become antagonisms. I can remember, from experience in dealing with Picardy peasants just behind the firing-line during the war, that dangers of bombardment or administrative penalties could hardly persuade one of them to abandon the farm which he owned, even when it was under fire. The threat of transporting him to the Midi always decided him at once. On the other hand, the Midi continues to hold bullfights, and to enjoy them in defiance of a law which has the entire approval of public opinion in the rest of the country ; and although the bullfights are gradually being superseded in popularity by football, it is Rugby football which has captured the South, while the North, in so far as it is interested in any variant of the game, has taken to Association.

Yes, the differences are real. Nevertheless, there is something which unites all these men of so many racial origins and dialects and customs, something that stamps them as belonging to France and no other country, something which to a certain degree is common to them all. That something is not merely that they have learnt to read and write in the same Government school or that they have done



PARIS A NEWSPAPER KIOSK



THE BOOKSTALLS ON THE WALLS OF THE QUAI  
FACING NOIR DAM



their military service in the same conscript army. There is a national character, which is to be found in every small French town, even in towns as far apart as Caen and Tarascon, and in every French peasant, whether he is growing sugar-beet or vines ; and that national character is also to be found in Paris.

It can be found there for two reasons : first, because, although Paris is not France, it is very much the centre of France, not only in the opinion of Parisians, but in the thoughts of all Frenchmen, and it is the centre intellectually and artistically, as well as politically and administratively and fashionably ; and, secondly, because everything that is typically provincial in France is also typical of Paris.

Although there is no town in the world which, in spirit and in civilized distinction, is more truly and undeniably a capital than Paris, there is none which is also so characteristically provincial. Moreover, many of the very people who spend half of their daily lives doing what makes the place a capital spend the other half in doing what shows it to be a provincial town. I need hardly say that I do not refer to that large and growing and ostentatious body of people who are at home in all the capitals of Europe and even of the world, and belong to none. The most satisfactory thing about cosmopolitan Paris is that as soon as it invades anything that is really French, such as the restaurants and dancing-rooms of Montmartre, the cafés of the Quartier Latin and the studios of Montparnasse, the French discreetly retire, and leave the field clear for the cosmopolitans to play at being French.

Of course that part of Paris which is an amusement city is in its way typically Parisian also, and stands for something which is typically French. It should, however, be taken, I think, as representing a national industry more than the national character.

I do not even refer to the Parisians who are always talking about being Parisian, to the Parisians of 'Le Tout Paris', who go to racecourses and *répétitions générales*, and dine in the most recently discovered smart restaurants. I am thinking of people who probably do not go to restaurants at all, who rarely go to the theatre and never to the races, but who, after working all day at what helps Paris to be a world-centre of bold political experiment, or constantly fermenting intellectual culture, or organically vital art, or instinctively dainty feminine fashion, take the tram or the *Métro* home to a quiet little meal, which has been bought by their wives in the morning at a little market round the corner, as like as two pins to the market of a small provincial town, and possibly to spend the evening at a quiet little café, whose appearance and customers are just like those of a provincial café.

Perhaps it would be more true to say that Paris is not so much like one provincial town as several. Every Parisian has his *quartier*, and sometimes, incredible as it may appear, he lives and dies without ever going out of it. If he moves from his flat, it is nearly always to another flat in the same *quartier*. The *quartier* is sufficiently self-contained to accommodate residents of all classes, just as all classes, in flats at different rents according to the different floors, may be found living in every house, except the very wealthy or the most pretentiously modern. The little market is the local market of the *quartier*, and those who buy at it deal direct with the small market gardeners, who have grown their vegetables in the suburbs and themselves brought them in to sell. Even the big market of the Halles Centrales has a provincial character. Much of the selling is done direct by the grower, and much of the buying direct by the consumer, and there are many cooks and even many housewives,



THE CHAIR MENDER AT A CAFE DOOR IN PARIS



EARLY MORNING IN PARIS THE CHIFFONNIERS SEARCHING  
THE HOUSEHOLD REFUSE





who take tram or *Métro* there every morning, and carry back their purchases.

Little provincial backwaters may suddenly be found in the most unexpected places in the very middle of the fashionable and flaunting and noisy part of Paris. One of them, with its modest shops, its modest residents, and its market, survived until a few months ago only a few yards away from the Madeleine. Others seem not even to be threatened. The Ile de Saint-Louis is still almost a little country town, though a stone could easily be thrown from it as far as Notre Dame. Until it was discovered by Americans a few years ago a resident in the Ile proudly boasted that it was impossible to buy the *New York Herald* without crossing the bridge to the mainland, and even now one can find there a newsagent who follows the old custom of leaving the papers on a tray outside the door, with a metal saucer, into which you are trusted to place the price of what you take, and from which you can also collect your change. Here, too, the old street-cries are occasionally heard, for there are not so many motor-horns to drown them.

The traditional street-cries of London are dead. Even 'Who'll buy my lavender?'—the last survivor, which I heard ten years ago in Westminster—is forgotten now, I suppose. In Paris they have had a longer life. The itinerant trades themselves have stayed later in the habits of the people. Even now the repairer of porcelain or the man who puts new cane seats to chairs may be seen at his pitch outside some modest café. They still have their cries too, though they are not particularly musical. The distinctive character is given to them not only by their chant, but by the notes of the instrument which precedes it. Thus the china-mender plays a little tune upon a flute, the chair-mender has another tune upon a sort of toy trumpet, while the

tripe-merchant has a shrill whistle and no tune at all, and the rag-and-bone man merely relies upon his lungs.

It is these provincial backwaters of Paris which are also the last resort of the purveyor of goats' milk, who still brings his goats to the door and milks them for you, although a decree of the Prefect of Police threatened to banish him from Paris only this year. While their master goes upstairs to deliver the milk, the goats lie about on the pavement, and one of them will probably try to climb a lamp-post, to see if there are any leaves to eat growing higher up.

While the urban goat-herd still survives, the urban cow-keeper has only just disappeared, even if it is certain that the last of his kind is gone. He was called a *nourrisseur*, and one of them, until only a year ago, kept his cows and delivered his fresh milk from a stable near the fortifications, which was attached to a little house, once the property of Baudelaire, and almost in the country, though it was within the walls of Paris.

Perhaps the most characteristic expression of the provincial quality of one aspect of the life of Paris is to be found in the street fairs, of which an example is almost always in progress in some quarter of the town. Can you conceive them in London? Can you picture, for instance, the shopkeepers and wealthy middle-class inhabitants of Maida Vale having to submit, for a whole month, to merry-go-rounds, shooting-galleries, and menageries being set up in the street, to traffic being obliged to crawl along the edge, and to sleep being rendered impossible before midnight by the noise of scenic railways and mechanical orchestras, while the public-houses push forward authorized extensions under tents into the roadway? And yet this is what happens every year at Neuilly in July, and is happening somewhere else in Paris all the time. Can you imagine that for

three weeks at Christmas-time a series of little booths being planted along the pavement of Piccadilly, as well as along such less fashionable streets as the Edgware Road, in order to afford business opportunities to the vendors of sweetmeats, mechanical toys, rubber stamps, patent collar-fasteners, and all the stock in trade of the kind of hawkers, who with difficulty obtain permission to risk their lives by standing in the gutter along the kerb of Ludgate Hill. Yet this is what happens in Paris, not only in the Boulevard Saint-Michel, but in the Grand Boulevards themselves, and not a hundred yards from the Opéra.

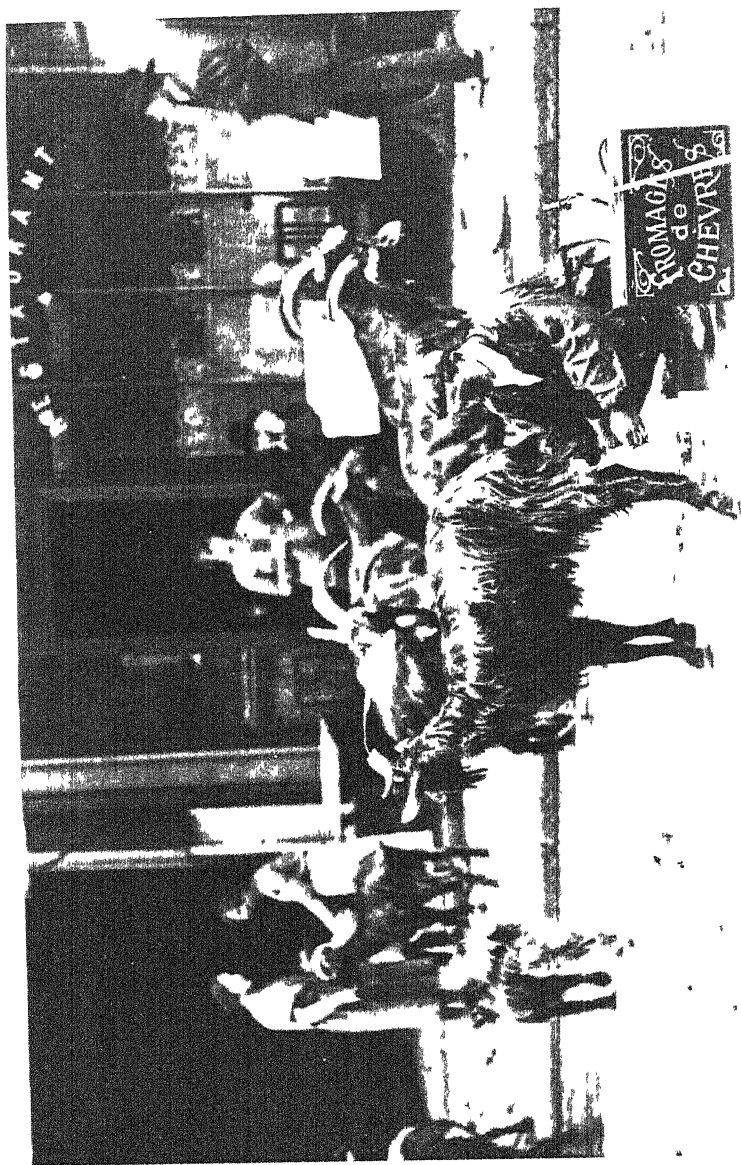
Trees contribute not a little to the impression that Paris is a country town. They contribute in several ways. There are the trees of her boulevards and avenues, which—although their decorative effect will be temporarily diminished until the horse-chestnuts, which cannot stand motor-fumes, are all replaced by planes, which can—still give character to the Paris scene. There are the trees to be seen over the walls of the many private gardens which still survive, almost in the centre of the town, though no doubt the rising value of land has now doomed most of them. There are the trees of the Bois de Boulogne and the Bois de Vincennes, which are not only wilder than any London park, but wilder and more wooded than one would expect at the gates of any big town; and there are the trees of the real forests, which are so near.

The belt of forests, with which Paris is surrounded, is not without influence upon the nature of her material development as a town and upon the character of her inhabitants. Paris has straggling suburbs, like all other big towns; but in almost every direction there comes a point where those straggling suburbs are suddenly blocked by a forest, which, being national and not private property, is

not likely to be built over. I am not thinking of the Bois de Boulogne or the Bois de Vincennes, which, although both outside of the line of the fortifications, have been surrounded and enclosed in greater Paris. I am not even thinking of the Meudon woods, which separate Paris from Versailles, though they are wilder than Hampstead Heath. I am thinking of really extensive forests, like those of Saint-Germain and Marly and Sénart and Armainvilliers, hardly more than ten miles from the centre of the town, and the still vaster forests of Rambouillet and Fontainebleau and Chantilly, where the Parisian can find really wild life less than twenty-five miles from the Opéra.

I have said that there are Parisians who live and die in their *quartier*. There are many more, who never venture farther than another part of Paris. That is the true provincial spirit. It is the same spirit which makes a Parisian very unwilling to live or work out of Paris—except when the time comes for him to retire—and makes the *Parisiennne* still more unwilling to live out of Paris, and stoutly refuse to live out of France. For this is not patriotism, though sentimentally the Frenchman is profoundly patriotic. France, in this connexion, is the particular little provincial corner of the country or of Paris where the Frenchman has grown accustomed to live, and where he has formed his little habits, for the Frenchman is very definitely a creature of habit. In his need for this little corner, he is more than ever typically provincial, and to be sent to an unknown part of France is not many degrees better than being sent abroad.

And yet one of the reasons which makes Paris so provincial is that there are so many Parisians who were not born in Paris, or at least did not spend their childhood in Paris, do not mean to spend their old age in Paris, and will not die in Paris. Still, they



MILKING GOATS IN A PARIS STREET



are true and enthusiastic Parisians. For them, as for every ambitious Frenchman and Frenchwoman, Paris has been the social and professional and intellectual goal from the beginning. They struggled, and their parents struggled for them, in order that they might become students at the University of Paris, rather than at any other, and they have made Paris larger than all the other universities put together. They have worked and schemed and intrigued in order that an official or business appointment in the provinces or the colonies shall lead to an appointment in Paris. As for going abroad, that was only thinkable as a provisional sacrifice which was to be rewarded by Paris. They are true Parisians, though they have come from every corner of France, for they have helped to mould the character of Paris, and have themselves been moulded by it. They have created the spirit of its students, the spirit of its journalists, of its barristers, of its doctors, and will carry that spirit back to the corners of France whence they came.

This paradox, which is to some extent that of every national capital, is especially that of Paris, because France remains, above all, a nation of very small country landowners. It is not only that the attraction of the town for the countryman brings the provincial to Paris. This economic phenomenon, familiar all over the world to-day, is operating in France also, but Paris owes her special character to something else. It is not even that the inheritance laws, which enforce the subdivision of property among children, induce those who own property and want to keep it together to have only one child, and thus further limit the already great reduction of fecundity in town populations, though the inheritance laws have something to do with the business, and help to enlarge the gaps which the provincials rush in to fill.

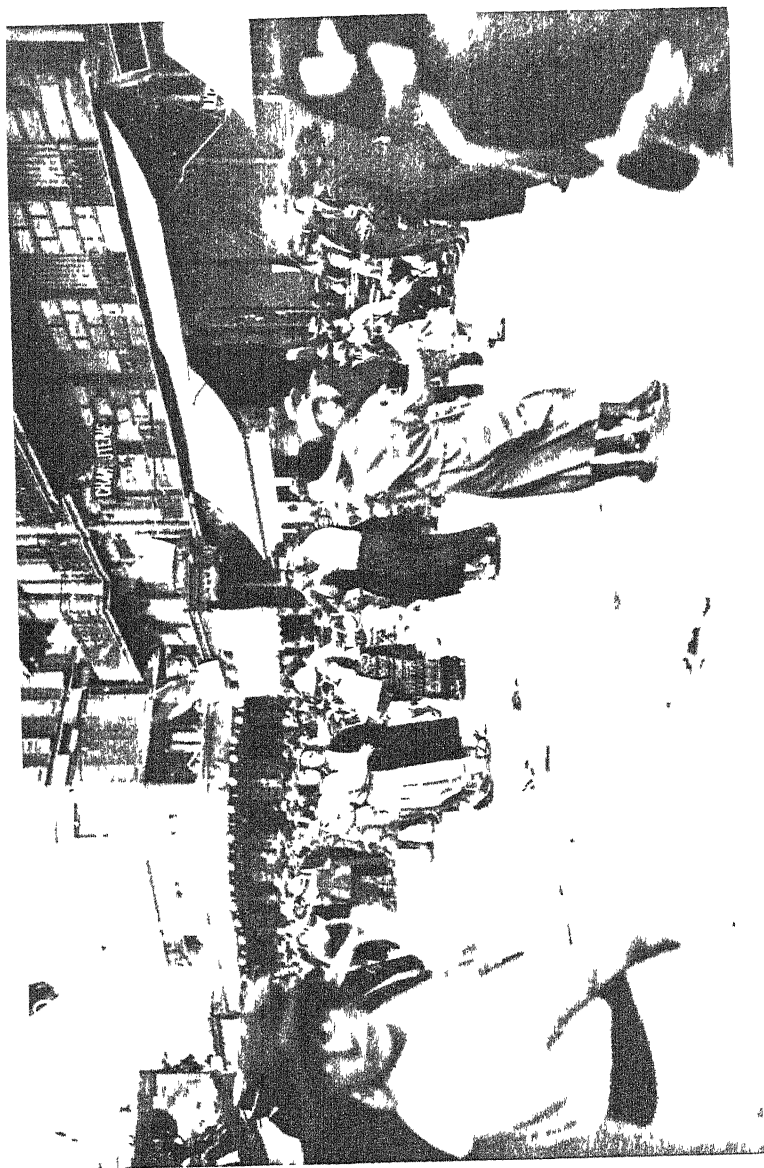


The peculiarity of Paris is that many of those same provincials, who flock to her when they are young, leave her again when they are old.

The reason is that every Parisian, like every Frenchman, will one day inherit a little piece of land somewhere in France. It is here that he will spend his old age, as his father is now spending his. It is here that he will send his children to pass the long summer holiday, if he does not pass it there himself. It is here that, if he is a man of modest earnings, he has probably sent those children to be brought up by their grandparents until the time for schooling. In order to retire to that little piece of land, when he reaches a reasonably early age, he has probably planned his life in such a way that he has accepted a very modest salary, if only there is a pension to look forward to.

Paris, therefore, is really France, because for all its refinement and all its artistic and intellectual eminence, it is inspired by, it is controlled by, it is even made up of, the small peasant proprietors, who are really France. France remains a nation of peasants. Statistically her agricultural population is still larger than her urban, though not so much larger as forty years ago. Practically, the balance remains heavily on the agricultural side, for a large part of the urban population of France is concentrated in Paris, which contains a fifth of it, and most of the rest in five other towns. There are only fifteen towns in France with a population of over 100,000. In Great Britain there are forty-five. France, however, has more than twice the area of Great Britain, and her population is smaller.

Although a comfortable Lancashire body, with whom I once had a conversation in the train, when she was on her way back from her first continental tour, was perhaps minimizing the importance of Paris when she described it as a 'pretty little town',



DANCING IN THE STREET ON JULY 11TH IN LAKES



## PARIS A PROVINCIAL TOWN

there are other towns in France which would to many Englishmen to be hardly larger villages. They are towns nevertheless. Not of them, to this day, have their city walls—the Paris have only just been pulled down. Even they have no walls, they have their octroi, the incoming farm-cart pays a municipal tax on the produce that he brings to market. They are straggles. Their limits are clearly marked in the agricultural plain. They are the judicial, military and police and commercial centres of the districts. The towns of France are, in fact, what few towns still are in England—small market towns in an agricultural country.

The character of the peasant is to be found in the public life of France as in the private. It is the back of the niggardliness of the State in part, the greatest of its public servants as the smallest. It largely accounts for the predominance of indirect taxation, which is the only form of taxation which the peasant can be made to pay, because he does not know that he is paying it. Indeed, to a certain extent he is not, for it falls much more heavily upon the townsman than on him.

The whole social fabric of France is not only based upon the peasant. It is based upon the peasant as the Revolution left him.

It is certainly the most democratic society in Europe. If you will examine the antecedents of those who are eminent in politics, in the arts, in learning, in all the professions, you will find the same things: first, that you cannot go back more than three generations without coming to the soil, and secondly, that the majority of successful men have modest origins, and are not in the least ashamed of them, while—and this is much more important—it never occurs to any one that they might be ashamed of them, or could be laughed at.

account of them. M. Herriot, whose mother was Maurice Barrès' cook, is only one example. M. Daladier, whose father was a baker in Carpentras, and whose brother kept the shop until he died last year, is another. M. Loubet, who was noted for his courtly tact and distinction when he was President of the Republic, but who, on one of his official tours in the Midi left his suite waiting on a country road by the side of a tiny little farm, while he went into the courtyard and threw his arms around the neck of an old woman in sabots, his mother, and then took off his coat to finish the furrow for his father, was a third. Loubet was described by King Edward VII, when he was Prince of Wales, as one of the few princes of the blood royal to be found in France, but he went back to the little farm to spend the last twenty years of his life.

One of the admirable things about France is not only the small beginnings of so many of her leading men, but the very simple lives which most of them lead, even after they have achieved distinction and even when they have not started at the foot of the ladder. Of course there still remain aristocratic families in France, and there are families of the *grande bourgeoisie* with traditions in industry and in responsible professional and administrative positions ; but the aristocratic families continue to stand aloof from the political and even the social organization of the Republic, and are hardly to be found serving the State at all, except in diplomacy, to some extent in the Army and to a greater extent in the Navy ; and the families of the larger and even of the smaller *bourgeoisie* have no such monopoly of professional employment as they virtually possess in Great Britain. The body of professional and industrial leaders—it cannot be called a caste—as well as the body of urban commercial men and small tradesmen, is constantly being recruited directly from the

peasant who tills the soil. Examples may be found in the origins of public men living or recently dead. Poincaré and Caillaux and Berthelot certainly come of *bourgeois* families. But if Clemenceau's father was a doctor, his grandfather was a peasant. Foch's people were very modest *bourgeois*, but those of Joffre were peasants. Briand and Chéron are among the majority of the members of the Chamber, who, like Herriot and Daladier, are of the people.

## CHAPTER III

### THE STREET SCENE

THE Frenchman loves the open air. That statement may surprise many who have met with his sometimes violent insistence upon having the railway carriage windows shut, or who have been nearly knocked down by what is only too often the congested atmosphere of his home, especially when, like a good peasant friend of mine in Savoy—who is a man of property too—he not only keeps the windows shut, but sleeps and works (at his second trade of village shoemaker) in a room which has the bed of himself and his wife in one corner, his little workshop by the window near it, and at the other end the stalls for his cows and the perches for his chickens.

It is true, nevertheless, that the Frenchman likes being out of doors. Like all countrymen who spend their lives under the skies, and like animals, who do the same, he prefers to be stuffy when he is under cover, but he enjoys the open. He enjoys it physically, and he enjoys it because it is by coming into the open that he keeps in touch with his fellow-men, who hardly ever cross the threshold of his home. Perhaps it is just because his family life is so exclusive that he likes to pass so much of his spare time out of doors—not in order to get away from his family, whom he often takes with him, but to meet his friends as well, and to spend with them what he most enjoys spending, and that is not his money, but his leisure. Perhaps it is also because the actual cubic space of the flat, or even the house, in which he lives, is always so restricted that he brings his family out of it as often as possible.

Certainly he comes out whenever he can. He comes out to seek the *terrasse* of his café, where, seated at an iron table on the pavement, he will spend an interminable time over one drink, writing his letters (with pens, ink, and paper supplied, free of charge, by the café), reading his newspapers (also supplied, free of charge, by the café), talking or playing draughts with his friends (draughts also provided by the café), or merely watching the passing flow of people and traffic. I am thinking, of course, of the Frenchman of the provincial towns and the provincial parts of Paris, and not of those cosmopolitan boulevards, where cafés have almost ceased to exist, or have become 'grill-rooms' and 'bars'. He will sit out on the *terrasse* even in the winter, and will be satisfied with the very relative warmth given out by the *brasero* of coke set up between the tables. If he goes inside, however, he requires all windows to be shut, though he will expect that, as soon as the weather is warm, those windows shall be so entirely open that it looks as if the whole face of the café has been removed.

If his habits and his purse allow him to take meals at restaurants at all, which is the exception and not the rule, his love for the open air will lead him to prefer to eat as well as drink on the pavement, but this time protected from the passer-by. The protection is indeed nominal, as it consists of a movable hedge of privet in painted boxes, but it marks the convention. If he never eats in restaurants, he will nevertheless take the chance of eating in the open air whenever he has time; and the first warm Sunday of the year will see hundreds of modest families taking their *déjeuner sur l'herbe* in the Bois de Boulogne, or in one of the forests around Paris to which I have already referred. Though the word 'picnic' has been taken from the English, the thing

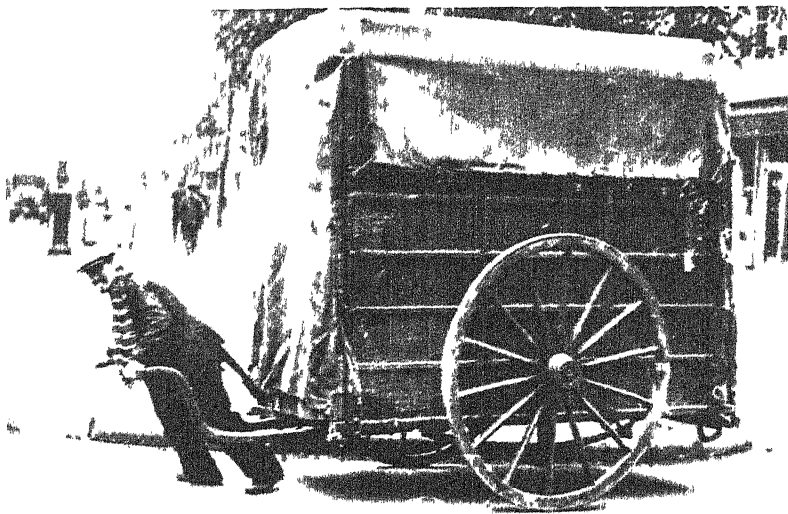


itself, is I think, far more common in France than in England.

Those who do not picnic—I am still speaking of the very small *bourgeois* and the working classes—may be found on Sundays in the *bosquets* or arbours attached to the little cafés on the outskirts of the town, which have long since been left behind by motorists. The latter will now rush out to lunch or dine—still in the open air—in those country *hosteleries* which make a gaudily striped umbrella over the table in the garden the excuse for an exorbitant charge for an ill-cooked meal. The former will be accompanied by his family, and will have brought along his food, and, taking off his jacket and his collar and tie, will make himself comfortable, half screened from the road by trellis work, at one of these unpretentious establishments, at which all that he will buy will be the drink.

The open air is even sought by those who do not care to venture even so far afield as the nearest café. The balcony, which is possessed by so many Paris flats, is far more used than are those rare examples, which are to be found on the first floors only of London houses, and the *concierge* or the small shop-keeper, on the ground floor, will not hesitate, after the day's work, to bring a chair out on to the pavement to read the evening paper there, in his shirt-sleeves, when the weather is favourable.

It would appear, in fact, that the pavement in a French town belongs, not only to those who care to walk along it, but to those who care to camp out on it, and even to the latter to the exclusion of the former. It is not only the *terrasses* of cafés and restaurants which take possession of it. How often does not a florist or a grocer extend his counters out into the open so far as only to leave a narrow passage for the pedestrian, and even occupy so much of that passage on the edge of the kerb by empty



HUMAN TRACTION IN PARIS—HARNESSED TO A CART FULL  
OF BAND BOXES



THE PAVEMENT COUNTER OF THE MAGASINS DU PRINTEMPS



cases, tubs and other rejected material that only a single file can pass between, and numbers of those who are in the least bit of a hurry step out into the street to get round the obstacle? Even great shops like the 'Printemps' and the 'Louvre' do a large business at tables which are set out on the pavement all day and only taken in at night. From the point of view of municipal organization this invasion of the street is of course a scandal, and is hardly less a scandal because the municipality takes money for allowing it; but much of the very individual charm of Paris would be gone if the *café terrasse* and the open-air shop were to be abolished.

A great part of the commercial life of Paris and of all French towns passes in the street. The barricades are an old tradition of street warfare, and *descendre dans la rue* is an expression which has come to stand for the ultimate form of forcible protest, by which a hitherto peaceful citizen suddenly decides to show his disapproval of the Government of his country. Every one in the street is tacitly supposed, by the mere fact of being there, to be acquainted with every one else. Anything that happens is everybody's business. The Irishman in Paris would have no need to ask, 'Is this a private fight, or may any one join in?' The mere fact of being on the spot gives him the right, not only to join in, but, before doing so, to offer advice and criticism, and to hurl abuse at whichever party appears to him for the moment to deserve it. I have seen the whole traffic, in both directions, on the Boulevard des Italiens held up for ten minutes because every vehicle and every foot-passenger stopped in order that each man, from whatever point of vantage he possessed or could acquire, shouted his opinion as to the best way to make a horse get up after he had fallen.

It is true that this happened before traffic

congestion became such a serious matter in Paris as it is to-day, and began to be so seriously dealt with. Then, when the *sergent de ville* held up his white baton, and shook it threateningly, he did not dare to do so without turning round to face the oncoming traffic, in case it should run him over instead of stopping ; and when it did stop it had, individually and collectively, a voluble argument with the *agent* as to why he had dared to stop anything at all, an argument in which, like the judge when there was laughter in court, the *agent* heartily joined.

That time is past, indeed, but it was not so very long ago, and if the sheer necessity of moving at all has made every one submit to efficient traffic control, there still remains the spirit, which inspires every man to assert the three fundamental rights of a French citizen in the street—the right to inquire into everything, the right to interfere in everything, and the right to protest against every kind of regulation and restraint, and to ask indignantly why any authority should forbid him to do anything which he has been told that he must not do. As to the first of these rights, it is well known that in street accidents, fires, riots or any other circumstance which puts the passer-by in danger, most of the lives have been lost through the Frenchman's insatiable curiosity to find out what is going on, and that the majority of those who have suffered have nearly always been those who had no business to be there, need not have come there, or, being there, would have done much better to go away.

The open-air communal life, which is supplied by the café and the bustle of the streets to a Frenchman, is furnished by shopping to a Frenchwoman. This remark may not seem to show any special power of observation, for shopping, in the sense not of going to buy things, but of going to see what there is to buy in the shops, is probably the main afternoon

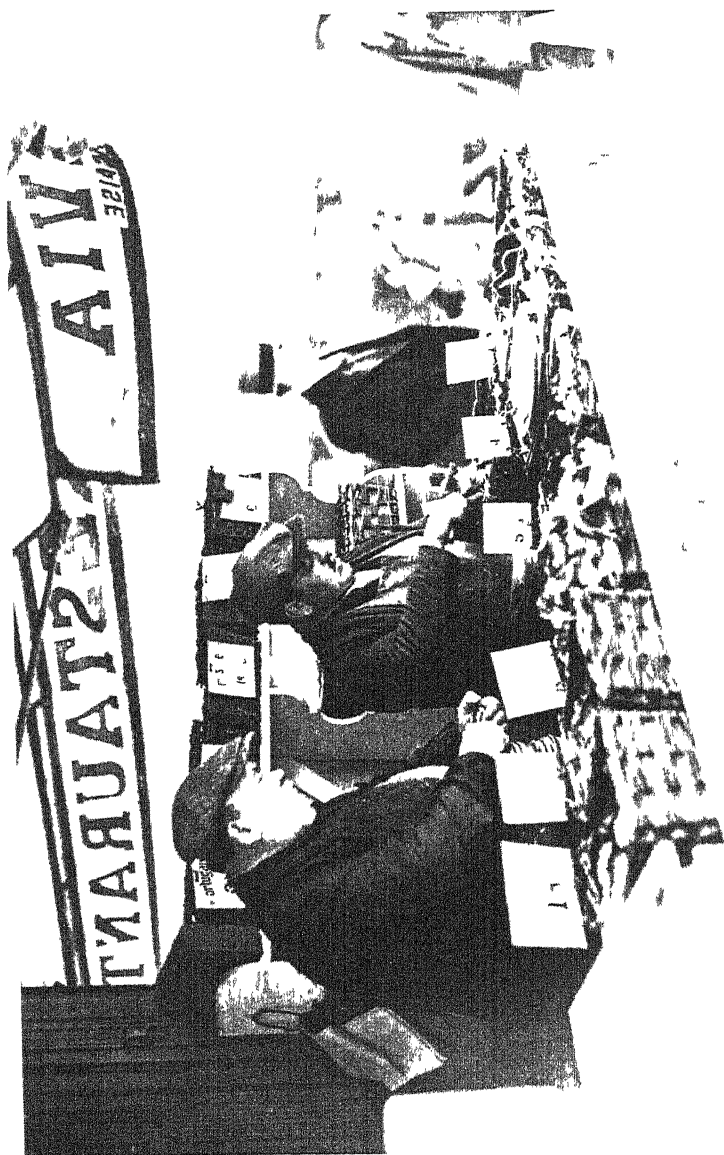
pastime of every town-dwelling middle-class woman in the world. It is no less so in Paris, but it is not to that sort of shopping that I refer. I am thinking of the morning shopping, when things really have to be bought and brought home quickly, in order that they may be prepared for the main gastronomic effort of the day in Paris—the midday meal. And since a great many middle-class women themselves do their morning shopping—but by no means in the same clothes that they will wear to shop in the afternoon—its importance as a social event is not confined to the thousands of cooks who sally forth at about half-past eight, each with a string or oilcloth bag, and return about half-past ten, staggering under the weight of that bag, now full to the brim and bulging out with meat, vegetables, and cheese, and with a long loaf of bread placed along the top under the handles and protruding at each end like the sword in a general officer's kit-bag. There will probably also be a can of milk or a litre of draught wine in the other hand.

The practice of tradesmen calling for orders is unknown in France, and although they will, if pressed, deliver those goods which have been ordered by telephone by such mistresses as do not follow the custom of the country, this system of supply is always discouraged by the cook. The reason is partly that she is afraid that unless she goes and buys the food herself and pay for it in cash—weekly household books are the exception in France—she will not make as much profit on the transaction as she considers she is entitled to receive. This profit is not merely the *sou du franc* which is her recognized five per cent commission and would be paid to her by the tradesmen in any case, but the proceeds of 'making the handle of the basket dance', or charging her mistress considerably more than she has actually paid, which many otherwise honest

French servants do not hesitate to do. However, perhaps she wants to look after the marketing even more because she does not intend to miss her one opportunity in the day for a little excitement, animated conversation, and opportunity for hearing from the other cooks what is going on in the *quartier*, and from the *concierge* downstairs what is going on in the flats on the other floors of the house in which she lives. So she throws her little knitted tippet over her shoulders, but makes no effort otherwise to modify or add to her rather slovenly working garments, and even goes on wearing the indoor felt slippers, which must be uncommonly cold in the street when the weather is damp.

Much of this shopping is open-air shopping. It is not merely that butchers and greengrocers have their shops half in the street, in Paris as elsewhere, but that many of those who sell are entirely in the street, with no shop at all. Even if the cook happens to be living too far from the local market of the *quartier* to make it worth while to go there, she can buy almost everything without entering a shop.

A few yards away from the main road she will, in even the richest quarters, pretty certainly find a side street in which the costermongers, or *marchands des quatre saisons*, have been allowed to take their stand. From these *petites voitures* she can buy almost everything she needs, even including meat in certain poorer quarters, and need only go into a shop for her milk and her bread ; and as Crainquebille can afford to underbid the shops, she can save that amount of money for her mistress, or, more probably, for herself. On her way home, still without entering a shop, she can buy the newspapers—for the news-agent is generally established in a *kiosque* on the edge of the pavement—and can treat herself to a few roast chestnuts from the old man who has set up his charcoal stove outside the door of the wineshop.



"OYSIENS AND SNAT'S" AN OPEN AIR STALL IN PARIS





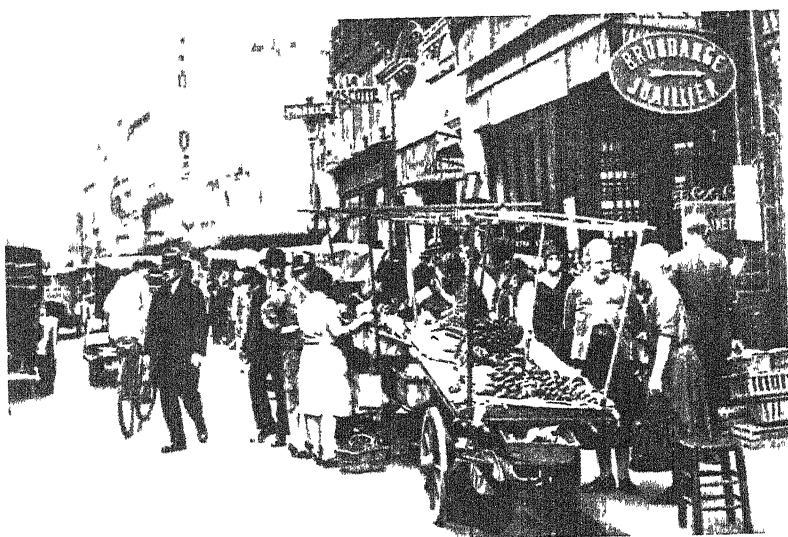
The shops themselves give many indications of the life of the people. The keeper of that little wine-shop, for instance, may be merely a *bistro*, and sell nothing but wine and spirits over his little zinc counter to the working men of the neighbourhood, or he may be a *bougnat*, and retail coal and firewood, which he delivers, by the sack of coal and by the handcart full of wood, to those—and they are the majority—who prefer to pay the retail price and give the recognized tip, which varies according to the number of flights of stairs, to storing coal in the cellar in bulk and fetching it up themselves. The wood is not merely what is used for lighting fires, but for burning in them, and logs are so comparatively cheap that many very economical people burn nothing else. In addition to this small section of his establishment, devoted to the fuel business, the *bougnat* may sublet a still smaller section of his shop to a *bouif*, or cobbler, who, looking out over his tiny counter into the street, adds another to the list of open-air trades.

Apart from the bigger shops in the main avenues, there is generally, in every residential street, a little colony of small shops which do a very localized business, and even serve, to the habitual patrons of more pretentious establishments, as an emergency source of supply when things run short.

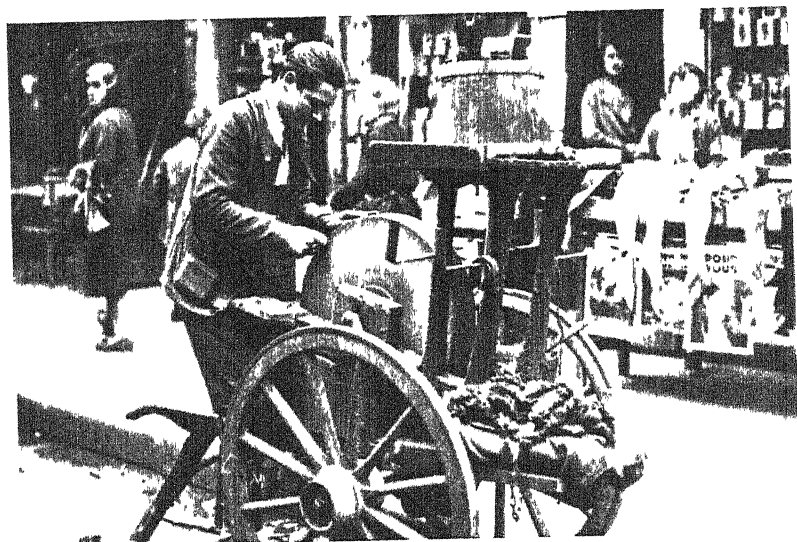
At my own street corner there are a *bougnat*—complete with cobbler—and as many as three other *bistros*. One of them has, at the end of his *zinc*, a tobacco counter, in which, acting in this department as the agent of the Government tobacco monopoly, he also sells postage stamps. Another becomes, at lunch-time, a popular and noisy restaurant for the building trades at work on new houses in the *quartier*, for your French working man has little use for the sort of dinner that can be brought in a handkerchief, and avoids it if he can. The only thing that he is

always ready to consume on the job is litres of wine, and a considerable part of the day's work of the young *compagnon*, or 'mate', consists in fetching these litres from the *bistro*, and taking back the empty bottles. You must not assume from this that the French working man is a drunkard. You will hardly ever see him drunk; but he wants his wine. There is a milkman, who also sells vegetables, as well as cheese and butter and eggs. The milk shop is typical of the dramatic sense of the French tradesman. Although the really effective control over the purity of the milk during the various stages of its progress from the farm to the shop is notoriously bad, you would hardly believe it in the Parisian milk shop, with its scrupulous cleanliness of marble and the spotless white over-sleeves—when it is not a complete white costume—of the lady who serves the milk in the carefully closed glass bottles in which she has previously poured it.

There is a grocer whom you could ask in vain to supply you with cheese, but from whom you can get sweetmeats and a large selection of bottled wines and spirits. There is an oil and colour shop, brilliantly painted, harlequin fashion, in many colours on the outside, according to tradition. There you can buy most of the things needed for house-cleaning, as well as nails and screws and a certain amount of crockery. There is a tiny haberdasher's shop, kept by a little old woman—her age also seems to follow an invariable tradition—and she sells a little stationery, as well as the kind of sentimental photographic post cards in which servant girls delight. There is a dyer, who not only cleans and dyes your clothes and your curtains, but also practises those microscopic arts—which must be horribly destructive of the eyesight—*stoppage*, or the invisible darning of torn clothes, and *remmaillage des bas de soie*, the analogous art for the treatment



A SIKILI MAKKEI IN PARIS



THE KNIFE GRINDER IN PARIS



of 'laddered' silk stockings, which has recently grown up.

There is a hairdresser. There are a butcher, a baker, and of course a *charcutier*, of whose highly varied and daintily attractive selection of cooked foods a mental picture can be given neither by the English words of pork butcher nor by that of ham and beef shop, though he is both. Those who have been familiarized in London with Appenrodt's can conceive, in a grosser form, what a *charcuterie* might be. There was also for a short time a fishmonger, but he failed, and his shop is shut, which is not surprising, for in spite of several attempted newspaper campaigns, the ordinary Frenchman has never really been converted to the eating of fish as an habitual food and not as an occasional delicacy, unless he be a Marseillais, or unless he be a Catholic and the season be Lent, and then he can get enough to satisfy his conscience from the greengrocer, who lays in a temporary supply. There is also a working locksmith up at the end of a courtyard, and he must do well, for the French have a talent for losing the keys of doors which must be opened in an emergency.

I give this little list of shops at my own street corner, for it is a group which is repeated at the corner of hundreds of streets in Paris, which are not otherwise shopping streets at all. Some of these small shops would be found at street corners in London, but probably only at the corners of back streets. In Paris they even exist at the most prominent points in what an English house-agent would call a 'highly desirable residential neighbourhood'. The fact indicates one or perhaps both of two things—that the rich often live much more simply than might be expected, and that there are always modest people on the upper floors of even the most expensive-looking houses. The only difference

between the little shops in a rich street and those in a poorer one is that the former will perhaps include a florist and a *tapisserieur*, or upholsterer, and of course none but the rich would spend money on buying flowers or doing up their furniture.

The shops which are omitted are perhaps not less significant than those which are included. There is no newsagent, for the Parisian either subscribes to a newspaper, and it is delivered to him by post every morning—he can pay the subscription over the counter at any post office—or he buys it at a *kiosque* when he goes out, and brings it back for his wife to read when he comes home to lunch; for every one goes home to lunch. There is no chemist until you get to the main avenue, for the Frenchman has not much respect for medicines and none for patent foods, and considers it to be no particular hardship that on Sundays, when many of the chemists are closed, he may have to go for miles to find one open. There is no fruiterer and no confectioner, for both fruit and pastries, desirable if you can afford them, are not of such daily consumption that you need to have them at your door.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE FAMILY IS EVERYTHING

**A**N Englishman who speaks of 'my family' means his wife and children. The very language does not provide for his having a family until he has set up a home. From the day when he leaves school, until the day when he is married, he is hardly reminded of any family ties, or at least of any family obligations, and even after he is married it is not every Englishman who can be described as a family man.

When French boys and girls speak of *ma famille*, you know they mean their parents—their brothers and sisters as well, on the rare occasions when they have any, but more especially their parents. As for a married man, his family may also mean his wife and children, as it does in England, and he may even be a *père de famille* if he has only one child. Indeed, from the very moment when a young man and a young woman marry they have created a family unit, which is much more important than is either of them individually, and they are described not as a married couple, but as a *jeune ménage*. The family as a whole, however, always includes the parents of the *ménage* as well as their children.

Fiercely individualistic as the Frenchman is against all the world, he is never allowed to forget, at any period of his life, that he has duties and responsibilities towards his family in this French sense of the word, and that his family has a power over him. That power can, in certain circumstances, be great. The *conseil de famille* is not merely a private meeting of certain members of a family ;



it has a legal existence and legally-defined functions. It meets under the presidency of the *juge de paix*, and is composed of three members from the father's and three from the mother's side of the family, all selected by the *juge de paix*. It comes into existence when either of the parents dies and the children are not grown up—though it can also be appointed to protect the interests of lunatics, minors and spend-thrifts—and it takes over the extended powers which the head of the family wields in France.

Those powers are historically the direct descendants of the Roman *patria potestas*, as so much in legal and administrative France is descended from the Roman civilization. Their strict application includes such parental rights as refusing permission to a daughter to marry until she has reached the age of twenty-one and to a son until he is actually as old as twenty-five. Even after those ages the young people are bound by law to ask their parents'—which means their fathers'—consent, and although, after having carried out that formality and having met with a refusal, they can then get married, they have only possessed that right since 1896. Before then they had to ask and be refused three times before they were free to marry whom they liked.

The powers of the head of the family according to the letter of the law, however, only represent a small part of the moral authority which he exerts according to tradition. No doubt some of it is breaking down in Paris and the big towns under the influence of the international standardization, which is destroying many national customs, while, curiously enough, it intensifies many national characteristics and antagonisms at the same time. Nevertheless, in the provinces and in that solid and unobtrusive part of Paris which I have described as provincial, it still survives. Perhaps there are few fathers who sit to-day, as Clemenceau describes

his father as having sat, upon a sort of throne ; but there is many a son with a wife and family, who, when his father comes to dinner, places him, as a matter of course, at the head of the table, and there is many another who, almost as much as a matter of course, has his father or his mother or his wife's father or mother to live with him ; for when a Frenchman marries he very definitely marries his wife's family as well as his wife, and it is not for nothing that a mother, whose daughter is married, will speak, not of ' My daughter and her husband ', but of ' My children '.

Indeed, the relation of sons and daughters, not only to their fathers and mothers, but to their fathers-in-law and mothers-in-law, becomes, in the working classes, something more than a traditional bond of moral respect. The Code Civil, that complete and compendious unification of the law and custom, which is perhaps the greatest monument of Napoleon's organizing genius, has made it a legal obligation of maintenance. Moreover, not only can children be called upon to provide shelter, food, and clothing for their parents, but the amount of that contribution, whether it comes from children or from the husbands and wives of those children, is deducted from any poor relief to which the old people would otherwise be entitled. Parents, are of course, under a similar obligation of what is called the *dette alimentaire* to their children.

At the same time, if the closely knit and fiercely defensive unit of the family includes, not only all descendants of husband and wife, but the parents of both of them, it is not, in another sense, so extensive a body as it might be in any family in England where a family sentiment exists at all. There is, in France, no clan feeling, and very little sense of common interests or affinities with cousins or other such remote connexions as merely happen

to have the same name. What binds a French family together is property, and it is because they contribute to, and are interested in, the family property that the parents of the wife have their natural place in it. All beyond the limit of the family property are strangers, whether they happen to be relations or not. If they are not relations, they are considered to be strangers to such a degree that, although the father or the mother, or some other member of the family, may be on cordial and friendly terms with them, and may be in constant touch with them, and although the whole family may constantly meet them away from the home, and may even converse unreservedly with them in cafés and other public places, they will probably never be invited to cross the threshold of the house, and it will occur to nobody—least of all to them—that they might be invited. This family exclusiveness is ancient and traditional; but it is no doubt also fostered, in towns at least, by the extraordinarily close quarters in which most families live. Those tiny flats, to which I have already attributed the town-living Frenchman's instinct for going out of doors when he wants to enjoy himself, prevent his asking his friends to come in, because there is no room; and, by the family exclusiveness which they create, they have much to do with the fierce quarrels between families, which are also characteristically French.

Within the family, however, though there are often lifelong and bitter hatreds, there is more often a fine spirit of united effort and united responsibility—all in the interests of the family, and usually in that of the next generation of the family. There are hundreds of small farms in the country, hundreds of small shops and tiny industries in the towns, in which all the work is done by the members of the family, the husband, the wife, and the sons and



HER FIRST COMMUNION PRIDE AND ENVY A STREET SCENE  
IN PARIS

because such hatred is prevented by law from being carried so far as to deprive its object of a share in the family property that it can become, on its moral side, so terrible and so unforgiving. No man in France can completely disinherit his children, or any one of them; nor can he leave to one child a larger share of his inheritance than to another. They must divide equally, whether they are boys or girls. All that a father—or a mother—can do to deprive a child or children of their inheritance is to make a will leaving a quarter of the estate to some one else. It is possible, however, to reduce the inheritance to nothing by previously disposing of the rights to the whole property in exchange for an annuity; but such is the force of family tradition that this is rarely done, even when parents have turned their children out of the house.

The position of the widow is settled at the time of the marriage. If there is a *contrat de mariage*, her share in the joint property—to which she has probably contributed her *dot* or marriage portion—is settled by that contract. If she has no *dot*, or if there is no *contrat de mariage*, the couple are automatically supposed to be married under the *régime de la communauté*, and the wife is from that moment endowed with half of the joint property, and, although she cannot touch a penny of it—or even of her own property—without her husband's consent during his life, she takes possession of her share at his death, not as an inheritance, but as the assumption of control over what was already hers.

It will easily be seen how these laws of inheritance in France affect not only the family but the whole of social life, and are responsible for much of its difference from our own. A son who has rebelled against the stern parental authority, who has refused to marry the wife his father had chosen for him, or has married one of whom his father disapproved, may

provoke so bitter and unforgiving a resentment that the father refuses ever to see him again, and it not infrequently happens so. Yet he will return after the father's death to take possession of the property of which his father could not deprive him—of which, indeed, so strong is family feeling, the father would hardly have wanted to deprive him, in spite of the bitterness of the quarrel. In the richer classes there are no penniless younger sons, having a good education and many friends as the sole assets in the adventurous or at least ambitious career to which tradition and their lack of fortune attract them. Every one has something—enough to live on, especially if, like many Frenchmen, he does not require much.

On the other hand, there are no eldest sons with the privileges and responsibilities of the heir. At least, a son is not the heir unless he is an only son and, indeed, an only child. Thus, the habit has grown up, in families who have property and dislike to contemplate the prospect of seeing that property divided, of limiting the family to one child. That habit has spread to families far more modest ; and there are hundreds of old women, who have spent most of their lives as servants and carry on into their old age as charwomen, so that they may continue to scrape and scrape in order to set up in life that one son upon whom the hopes of their lives have centred.

It will be seen that in this way the laws of inheritance have had some influence on the population question. I do not mean that they are entirely responsible for the fact that the population of France as a whole is almost stationary, while in certain districts it is notably diminishing ; for the infant death-rate, which is much higher in France than in England, is as much to blame as the low birth-rate ; and the general death-rate, which is also

higher, has an important share. However, there is no doubt that those who possess property have a tendency deliberately to restrict their families.

Moreover, the highly developed sense of property and the exclusive individualism, which is both its result and its cause, even have something to do with the high general death-rate and the high rate among infants. The Frenchman not only has no sense of being his brother's keeper, but would indignantly deny having any responsibility for him. The French are nearly always kind, and are often very generous, but they have hardly any sense of a duty of helping any one who is unable to help himself. The absence of that sense among employers and in the community as a whole makes it possible that sanitary conditions, both of labour and habitation, exist among the poor which would not be publicly tolerated in any other country, though France, being a rural rather than an urban community, has no slums to rival with the worst of those of England and Scotland.

The sense of property and the rigid economy which goes to building it up contribute to the high mortality in another way. A French peasant will call in the veterinary surgeon for his cow long before he will think of sending for the doctor for his baby ; for a baby can be replaced at no cost except suffering to the mother, and a cow is worth money ! He will even refuse to go to see the doctor himself, not because he distrusts him, but because he grudges paying him his fee. As for the babies, the mortality among them in the working classes in towns is also increased by the habit of the mothers putting them out to nurse in order to be able to go on working and make more money ; though when the child is lucky enough to find good foster-parents or to be sent to older relations it may gain something by being in the country.

As property governs the family in general, so does it govern marriage in particular. '*Ma mère m'a trouvé un mari. Quel petit homme, qu'il est petit.*' So runs the old French song, in which girls made fun, not of the fact of the mother choosing the husband, but of the sort of husband that she had chosen. No doubt the power of mothers in choosing their daughters' husbands is not what it was, and the daughters themselves take a hand. No doubt the time is past when an intermediary would suggest the marriage to the young man selected by the mother, would give an indication of the amounts of the bride's *dot* and of the fortune which the bridegroom would be expected to possess, and would furnish him with an opportunity of viewing the young lady; and all this before the young lady herself was told anything about the proposition. Marriage is nevertheless still quite frankly regarded as a contract about property, or at least as an association for a working partnership, rather than as the last act of a flirtation.

The result is that, certainly in the middle and lower middle classes, the relation of a wife to her husband is much more that of a partner on the one hand and a companion on the other than in England. The depreciation of the franc, as it has divided by five the real value of the *dot* which many fathers had spent years in saving up for their daughters, has perhaps made the *dot* count for less in the transaction; but the *petit bourgeois*, who used to look out for a wife with a *dot*, now looks out for a wife with a job, and the element of partnership remains. It is perhaps this constant element of business partnership which brings it about that long engagements in France are unknown and an action for breach of promise almost unheard-of. The marriage is a contract which can either be made at once or is not in question at all. Promises which cannot



at once be fulfilled seem, to the French mind, to bear no relation to it.

Of course it would be quite untrue to say that unmarried girls do not flirt in France to-day—though that might quite well have been said twenty years ago, partly because, in the *bourgeois* classes, they never had enough liberty to get the chance. It is another question whether the absence of such flirtations was a good thing, either for girls, who were led to think that marriage alone opened the opportunity for having a good time, or for boys, who were tempted to sow their wild oats in less innocent fashion. It would be equally untrue to say that there are not, and have not always been, marriages of sentiment. Flirtation, however, is not yet the surest way for a girl to win a husband, and the marriages of sentiment have been mostly those in which men have made wives of their mistresses.

Though the old tradition forbade the companionship of boys and girls, the married woman was excluded from no form of social life, and still has her place in all of them. A wife will hardly let her husband out of her sight—partly because she does not trust him out of her sight, and partly because the husband himself usually wants her as his constant comrade and adviser, both in business and pleasure. Thus, she accompanies him to the café. She accompanies him to the foyer of the theatre during the *entr'actes*, and she refuses to leave him at the dinner-table for his dessert. English social life presents a recurrent separation of the sexes. Man breaks away from woman by going to his club. He breaks away between the acts at the theatre. He insists upon her leaving him for a while after dinner. None of this in France. Most Frenchmen want the constant company of women, of their wives or their mistresses, or of other men's wives or mistresses. Let those who wish for an

illustration compare the severely monastic atmosphere of the British delegation at Geneva with the bevy of feminine camp-followers—official and unofficial—which accompanies the French, or let them recall that dinner of distinguished literary men which was offered to Anatole France in London, and which he refused to attend unless women were invited too.

The change in the relations of boys and girls in France shows the same difference between the two national characters. In England the girls are ready to accompany the boys when the boys want them, which is not always. In France, if the girls are ready to accompany the boys, which is not always, the boys want them all the time. In England this companionship slowly leads to flirtations, and these flirtations slowly to marriages, and only rarely to anything less regular. In France it not only develops immediately into, but entirely consists of, flirtations, and those flirtations lead, not so very infrequently, to relations which, before the war, were admitted as regrettable but possible where married women were concerned, but were then quite inconceivable and unpardonable if marriage had not freed the woman from tutelage. The freedom of unmarried women is so new as to exist only since the war in France ; for it is only since the war that a middle-class unmarried girl can go out of the house without being accompanied by her mother or a maid. It has not changed the special and very solid position of married women in French life—a position which may be described as that of the effective ruler of the household, without having any legal authority in it whatever. A married woman still needs the written authority of her husband—*bon pour autorisation maritale* are the words which he writes on the document—before she can open a banking account, take out an insurance policy, or, indeed, accept any

employment. She is *en puissance de mari*, in the legal phrase. She is not authorized to be a member of a *conseil de famille*. Her husband still has complete control of her property, and it is only since 1891 that a widow has any right to a share in the estate of her husband, if he dies intestate and she has not been provided for in the marriage contract. Neither she nor any other woman has the vote, and it seems very improbable that she will get the vote.

She will not get it, for she is making no real demand for it. If she did, she would have it to-morrow ; but she does not, because she finds it difficult to conceive the interest of women as separate from that of the family ; and in the family, she already holds quite as much power as she wants. She holds that power because she is nearly always the organizing genius, and her efficiency is magnificent. It is this efficiency which makes her the cashier in her husband's business and the banker in his household, often doling out to him an allowance in pocket-money from the funds which legally she is not allowed to touch. It is this efficiency which enabled her to carry on the whole work of the country on the very day after war was declared, and after a far larger part of the male population was suddenly taken off to the army than in any other country ; and she required no special uniform and no special enlistment to do so. It is this efficiency which is responsible for the fact that a woman—acting always through her husband—was the real organizing founder of each of the two great shops of the Samaritaine and the Bon Marché, and that women have also been largely instrumental in founding and managing other business houses, as well as supplying most of the directive spirit as well as a great part of the heavy physical labour in agriculture all over the country.

The remarkable efficiency which Frenchwomen have shown and continue to show has, however, been constantly exercised within the family and for the family. Patriarchial as French family life is legally, it is in practice very largely matriarchal. In no country is the mother held in such affectionate veneration and respect as in France. The sentimental bond between French mothers and their children is proverbial, and, fond as French women are of attracting and pleasing men, there would never be, in a Frenchwoman, the slightest hesitation between her duty as a mother and her duty as a wife. The mother would always come first.

Able and active as they are in the organization of the family business, Frenchwomen do not take part in public life. Few of them sit on committees or appear on platforms, or even devote themselves to work among the poor—which the poor, in any case, would not stand. Their instinct is to avoid imitating men, and that is perhaps why few of them play tennis and fewer still golf, though they have supplied champions in both games. They are very much afraid of appearing ridiculous, and they are so prejudiced as to think that it would be so for a woman of fifty to be seen dancing in a public ball-room.

Yet many of them go out into the world and earn their living. They are doctors, dentists, journalists, editors, and even barristers—the first women barristers were in France. They hold responsible administrative positions in every business. What they never seem to be is old maids. Perhaps it is because officially they become old maids at an age when they are still young enough to laugh about it, and to know that hope is not really by any means lost; for although a girl who is unmarried at twenty-five is supposed to *coiffer Sainte Catherine*, there are many who find a husband after that.

Perhaps it is because, although the excess of women over men is much the same in France as in other European countries, there are many Frenchmen, at least in the towns, who are not monogamous in fact, though they may be so in law. Almost any woman can have a home and a family—and even if she may not be able to retain permanent hold upon a husband, she can often manage to secure a far more durable loyalty and companionship from the father of her child than many people who are not French seem to imagine.

Perhaps many of those who, in middle-class England at least, became old maids, in France become nuns, although the number of nuns in the country—somewhere between 50,000 and 100,000—cannot account for all the unmarried women, even in that class.

No doubt the phenomenon is only another instance of the fact that in spite of all their legal disabilities, and the absence of any appearance of authority, women in France really govern social life. The thrift and caution of the French are really the thrift and caution of Frenchwomen. In France the ideals in literature and art are even more the ideals of women than they are in other countries; and if fighting seems to be one department which women do not control, who knows whether the Frenchman's instinctive conception of war, as being above all worth while for its glory, is not chiefly due to the fact that women, whose approval he never fails to seek, whose smiles are always in his thoughts and his conversation, and whose constant companionship he cannot do without, have always admired war for its *panache*.

## CHAPTER V

### GOOD MANNERS

A GENTLEMAN is a man who is only rude on purpose. If that is a true definition, then all Frenchmen are gentlemen, for they are never rude unless they mean to be rude, which is not often. On the other hand, there are not many gentlemen left in France, if a gentleman is a man with some trace of aristocratic breeding in appearance, dress, and manner, as well as a conscious if urbane superiority and a capacity to be distant as well as distinguished. There is not many a Frenchman who can look as if he thought he were about to be insulted by a waiter, and there are not many French waiters on whom the look would have much effect ; for the waiter would either be too well trained professionally to be in the least likely to be insulting at all, and, without sacrificing a jot of his consciousness of real social equality with anybody, would have long since learnt the hotel manager's maxim that the customer is always right ; or else, if he were less perfectly trained, he might, without being in the least insulting, be so agreeably and so openly familiar that it would be quite impossible to crush him by a glance. As for the gentleman, he could only belong to that old aristocracy which, by its deliberate abstention from all public life since the foundation of the Republic, has acquired the rather pathetically historical air of all aristocratic things in modern democratic France, and he would probably have learnt by now that the haughty manner has become ineffective—and more ineffective than ever since the war.

Yet, if there are not many gentlemen in France, there is hardly any one, in any class, who does not know how to behave. The French have acquired that knowledge, partly through a tradition, which has very carefully handed down the code of good manners from one generation to another, since it was formed at the end of the seventeenth century, and partly because, by racial temperament, they are never self-conscious, and have that supple instinct of how to adjust themselves immediately to the social situation, which is indicated by the French words *savoir-faire*.

The fact that most Frenchmen think clearly, have been taught to express themselves clearly and in an orderly and logical form, and have a horror of speaking in a confused or hesitating way, may also have something to do with their power of being polite when they wish to be polite, as it also has with their power of being rude in a very pointed way when they wish to be rude.

France has been described by an Italian observer as *le pays du compliment*, and certainly the French delight in paying compliments, and do so continually and with the utmost grace. Even the backbiting of an absent friend, which can hardly wait until he has left the room, will begin with a few compliments about him, which form a nicely-turned transition between those other compliments which have been paid openly to his face and the scandal which is about to tear him to pieces.

For if the Frenchman can be rude on purpose, he can also be delicately and allusively rude about people who are not present, and he can be negligently rude to people whom he does not know. There is far less consideration and far more pushing in a French crowd, even a well-dressed crowd, in the street or at the theatre or in a shop, than in a similar crowd in England.

A Frenchman of to-day will only give up his seat to a woman in a public place if he knows her. or if he wants to know her—and it may charitably be supposed that it is because the unknown lady might suspect him of the latter design that the well-mannered man refrains from making her uncomfortable. When he is already accompanied by a lady whom he knows, he need not, of course, have this scruple, and possibly that is why—or is it merely to create an effect?—that he will in these circumstances offer his seat to a stranger with a flourish.

However, even when the Frenchman or the Frenchwoman is rude, the forms of politeness are always observed, and the more heated the argument becomes, the more freely will it be sprinkled with '*Monsieurs*' and '*Madames*'. At the same time, such is the universal consciousness of social equality that never, even in the most passionate verbal contest, when '*Madames*' were falling thick and fast, have I heard the title deliberately withdrawn. 'You're no lady', which has been sovereign in England for a hundred years, has no bite in France.

If I have thus set out the different ways in which a Frenchman is capable of being rude, I must not be taken to suggest that he often is. On the contrary, no one is more kindly, more good-humoured, and more obliging, and that quite apart from the national and almost inexhaustible reserves of gaiety. All that is necessary is to set up some kind of personal relation with him. Pass a Frenchman in the street and he will very likely jostle you. Stop him and ask him a question and he will take a surprising amount of trouble and spend a surprising amount of time in giving you an answer. He is sure to give you some kind of answer, even if he does not really know the right one, and that pardonable



vanity in not being willing to confess to an incapacity to oblige you sometimes makes him a rather insecure counsellor—but it does not make him any a less pleasant fellow. Moreover, once the personal relation—on whatever plane of intimacy it may happen to be—is established, there are certain rules of courtesy which the Frenchman would not think of breaking. It is not easy to be admitted to the Frenchman's home, but no visitor, once admitted, would ever receive a hint that he has overstayed his welcome, nor would his departure ever be alluded to ; and the habit of the English week-end host of asking his guest on Saturday night which train he would prefer to take on Monday morning would seem very ungracious in France. The Frenchman's real dislike of hurting people's feelings, of saying anything which may seem discourteous or merely be a not very pleasant or not complimentary truth, has not only filled his language with expressions for gracefully wrapping up such truths when they have to be told, but makes him constantly exercise delicacy and tact, and, even on the rare occasions when he wishes to be unpleasant, he is cutting rather than brutal. As he is above all things sociable, he responds at once to any overtures for establishing a personal contact, and as, in spite of his industry, his own leisure is one of the things that he will never surrender to his employer, he always has time, not only to give advice—which he will supply in plenty—but to take trouble to be useful to a friend or even a chance acquaintance.

It is partly good manners, but partly also that instinct for establishing a friendly and agreeable personal contact, which makes the morning greeting so important and the absence of it become almost an affront. Servants always wish 'good morning' to their masters, who return the wish. When the clerks in an office arrive at the opening of business,

not only is there a complete round of 'good mornings' from everybody to everybody. but of hand-shakes also ; and there is a corresponding round of farewells and hand-shakes at closing time, and sometimes even for the very limited absence of the luncheon-hour. When a certain degree of intimacy is reached, the hand-shakes may be with the left hand instead of the right.

Whenever I go to a French tea-party, and see the drawing-room chairs set in a precise circle, I cannot help remembering that the very rigid code of French ceremonial manners has been directly inherited from the time of the *Grand Monarque*, and has hardly been altered since that date, when it may be said that the social civilization of France, and much of her intellectual civilization as well, became crystallized. No doubt there was a short period, at the Revolution, when every one in France said, '*Non, citoyen*', '*Oui, citoyenne*', just as every one in France, from street sweeper to President, says, '*Oui, Monsieur*', '*Non, Madame*', to-day, whatever the class of the person addressed—mere '*oui*' or '*non*' being reserved for intimates or direct subordinates. The Revolution, however, which changed most other things French, could not change French politeness, and its old forms returned.

Those forms must be observed with an exactitude which the niceties of official courtesy in the East cannot, I am sure, excel. The Indian civil servant learns which are the princes, a letter to whom must be signed 'your friend' and which 'your sincere friend'. In France every man must learn when he must assure his correspondent of his '*haute considération*', when '*considération distinguée*' is sufficient, when '*parfaite considération*' is more appropriate, to whom you send no more than '*salutations*', or '*sincères salutations*', and just at what degree of friendship it is permissible to ask your correspondent



announce that 'Madame is served' when they mean that dinner is ready. Moreover, these seventeenth-century locutions survive, not merely in the houses of the old aristocracy, but all over France, and almost in every class. I remember hearing the owner of a small café in a small town, introducing one of the regular customers to the man to whom he had just sold his goodwill, and presenting him as '*un de nos plus sympathiques bouchers*'.

Tradition also surrounds the use of the intimate second person singular. Many husbands and wives, who '*tutoyer*' each other in private, would think it improper to do so in public, and although they would continue to say '*tu*' to their children, they would make them answer, '*Vous*', if any one else were present.

There is a whole ritual surrounding visiting cards—their form, as well as their use. Even now there are many married women who would not think of allowing their address to be printed on their visiting cards, which are smaller than those of men, and continue to add it in pencil when it has to be given at all. As for men, not only is the address given, but also a whole catalogue of professional, scholastic and other descriptive titles, some of which are so unintentionally comic that M. Louis Barthou, the academician and former Premier, has made what is already a famous collection of them.

The New Year is stiff with ceremonial formalities, in many of which the visiting card plays a part; and although in Paris some of the social duties of the first day of the year are less rigorously observed than they were, they survive in the provinces, and the family duties and the official duties survive everywhere. The last impose a formal visit from every servant of the State, civil or military, to his official superior, and on the first of January the approaches of the Elysée are blocked by the cars

of those who call to pay their respects to the President of the Republic. Apart from this, the day belongs to the family. Little children learn poems to recite to their parents when they wish them a '*Bonne Année*' on New Year's morning. Older children would hardly miss seeing their parents on that day, or on the day after, if New Year's Day keeps them at home with their own children. The evening is devoted to an intimate family dinner-party, with no traditional dishes, such as the turkey stuffed with chestnuts and the black puddings (and white puddings) of the Christmas Eve midnight *réveillon*, but with a tradition of family solidarity. As for the New Year's Eve supper-party, that is a festival imported from abroad and quite comprehensibly encouraged by the restaurants in order to dispose of some of the fare which has been left over from the real *réveillon* at Christmas, but can hardly be said to exist outside of Paris.

Before the New Year arrives, however, there are other traditions to be observed. There are *étrennes*, which mean not only Christmas boxes to *concierges* and servants and postmen, but presents to friends. There are visiting cards to be posted or distributed by hand. No doubt there are fewer visiting cards sent out than there used to be, and not to send a card at the New Year is no longer considered to be a polite but definite way of dropping an acquaintance. Nevertheless the post office still allows the visiting card, with five words of good wishes, to be sent for half the price of an ordinary letter, and strict etiquette, though it is dying, dies hard in France. Thus there are still bachelors who consider it a duty to send a bouquet of flowers or a box of sweets for the New Year to the hostesses at whose houses they have dined, and there are still friends, who, in return, still pronounce the traditional phrases of ecstatic admiration on opening the parcel—more

especially if the gift is modest, for that is what good manners demand.

Soon after the New Year there are other duties. If the calls which the precise Frenchman and Frenchwoman of a generation ago would have made on all their friends in January are no longer the universal fashion in Paris, they have not disappeared, and they are still the rule in provincial towns. What has virtually disappeared, however, is the annual complimentary gift of the tradesman to his customers. It was usual even up to the war for the baker's girl to bring you, on Twelfth Day, a round and flat cake of puff pastry, which was known as the '*Galette des Rois*'. So, too, the grocer's boy would present a piece of gingerbread, the waiter at your favourite café would give you a couple of cigars tied up with ribbon, and others in like manner. The only survivor of those courteous traditions is the habits of the postman, who still offers his gift of an almanac to hang in the kitchen for the rest of the twelve months to remind you that even if it is useless, and its presentation is obviously ground bait, it nevertheless represents a civilized idea.

To-day, if you want to *tirer les rois* and give paper crowns to the King and the Queen—that is, to the man and woman of the party whose pieces of cake happen to contain the two tiny dolls which are baked in it—you must buy your *galette* yourself.

The Frenchman's feeling about ceremony is well illustrated by his attitude towards the uniform. The German respects a uniform because the man who wears a uniform gives orders and must be obeyed, and when German uniforms attempt to appeal to the imagination at all it is by being overpowering rather than decorative. The Frenchman admires a uniform because it is worn by a man who performs a ceremonial and symbolic duty, whose

uniform marks his place in the ritual, which may be the gallant and romantic ritual of the soldier—remember the cadets from St. Cyr at the beginning of the war, who got killed in white gloves and carrying gold sword-knots—or may be the more polite ritual of civilian functions, but is in any case a ritual which requires appropriate and, if possible, splendid vestments, and, above all, vestments which are truly symbolic, even when they are reduced to being nothing more than a badge of office.

Thus the prefect of a department has a uniform as magnificent as that of the lord lieutenant of a county, and puts it on far more often, for he wears it on all official occasions, and his is by no means merely a nominal post ; while a sub-prefect, who represents the central authority of Paris in a small market town, also has one, which is hardly less impressive. The *Suisse*, who symbolically guards the door of a country church, suggests the lord mayor's coachman, with a halberd added, though a lord mayor's coachman considerably run to seed, and a bank messenger goes about his daily business in town looking rather like a down-at-heels admiral—that is to say, he did until his cocked hat was abolished only a year ago. It must be admitted that the Frenchman does not often possess the knack of looking smart in his uniform, but he really attaches less importance to that than to the fact of the symbol being there. The village *garde champêtre* represents the law, even though the only outward sign of his function is a very shabby cap of a vaguely military shape, worn with his ordinary peasant's clothes ; and he has only to add his badge of office—an oval brass plate on a broad leather band, worn diagonally across the body—for his person to become sacred. The tricolour sash wrapped around the middle and revealed by a deputy raising the corner of his waistcoat and

so proving that he is a member of the Chamber used also to be a symbol of even greater impressiveness ; and although it is now more rarely used, it has occurred to nobody that it might be ridiculous. Nor does it seem to any one ridiculous that a number of elderly literary gentlemen should attend all official ceremonies wearing green uniforms and swords, merely because they are members of the French Academy. It was even seriously proposed some time ago, by a distinguished member of the staff of the *Temps*, that a uniform should be designed and authorized for journalists who accompanied the President of the Republic on official occasions. The proposal was examined, and eventually rejected ; but nobody laughed.

In a country where tradition and etiquette and symbolic authority govern every relation of social life and every rule of public conduct, it may seem surprising that no ceremony which brings more than half a dozen people together can ever be carried through without confusion ; but that is because a whole set of other elements in the French character then come into play—impatience, a desire to be just a little more quick and clever and ingenious than other people, a particular incapacity to resist trying to find a short-cut where the orderly way is the long way round, an instinctive resistance, not to authority in itself, but to the particular foolish and illogical and aggressive way in which it appears that authority is for the moment being exercised. The result is that there are always a number of unauthorized people within the ropes, or standing on chairs, or pushing against the stream of a crowd, or deliberately breaking some rule or other of the organization. Nevertheless all this implies neither bad manners nor a dislike for the forms of politeness or parade. Indeed, so important are these forms considered to be in public that there is a special



government official, the *Directeur du Protocole*, whose business it is to look after them, as much as it is the Lord Chamberlain's business in a country where there is a Court. What it does imply is that the Frenchman is incorrigibly what he calls '*frondeur*', which can only be translated as 'rebellious'. He hates observing regulations; and Clemenceau, who openly boasted that he had a number of books belonging to the *Bibliothèque Nationale* in his possession, which, he gleefully added, he would return when he had time, was no less French in this than in many other ways. The existence of the *frondeur* spirit nevertheless has many inconveniences and some dangers. It is not only the crowd which neglects to observe regulations, and the way in which, in theatres and other public places, gangways are blocked up, not only by the little tip-up seats called *strapontins* but even by extra chairs, and all this with impunity, would make a London County Council theatre inspector's hair turn white.

It has been said that France is the country of no spare bedrooms. It is certainly the country of no dropping in to meals. It is an essential part of the French conception of hospitality that it is a very serious and ceremonious thing, and that it can under no circumstances be unprepared or casual. No French host would dream of inviting friends to pot-luck, nor would any French hostess consent to receive them in such conditions. The result is that when a Frenchman cannot give a dinner-party he asks no one to dinner at all, and when he has not the means to entertain friends royally for a week it does not occur to him to put them up modestly for a night.

The restricted accommodation of French flats in towns and the small number of rooms in which even well-to-do families live no doubt have something to do with not asking friends to eat without considerable notice and not asking friends to stay at all.

The close and exclusive tradition of the French family has much more. Within the family alone can a Frenchman really be at his ease. With every one outside of the family he must be on his best behaviour, which partly means on the defensive. A stranger cannot be admitted to the intimacy of the family, and entertaining him consequently becomes a matter of studied politeness, as well as a display which can only be undertaken rarely. That is why a Frenchman will chat to any one in a café or a railway train, will strike up an acquaintance with any one with the greatest ease, and will even allow that acquaintance quite pleasantly to ripen into a friendship, but will hardly ever invite any one into his home.

When a Frenchman does give a dinner-party it is a great affair. On ordinary days lunch is the principal meal of the day for himself and his family, and he eats very little in the evening ; but when he gives a dinner-party it is a feast. It generally is a dinner-party and not a lunch-party, for tradition rules in this as in everything else, and although lunch-parties are beginning to have a certain vogue among the unconventional, dinner is still the formal meal.

In a modest household, much or even all the meal may come from a cook-shop. There are confectioners who make a speciality of sending out meals, ready cooked and hot, in special containers, and a guest who arrives at a small flat to find no smell of cooking, no indication of the excitement of preparation, and then sits down to a seven-course dinner will know that it has been sent in from outside.

Although women play so important a part in French social life, and the English habit of their leaving the men alone at table for their coffee and cigars is unheard of, that other and outwardly more gallant English habit of allotting each man a partner

to take in to dinner is almost unknown also except on official occasions ; but that may be because the dining-room is almost invariably separated from the drawing-room only by glass double doors, and the procession would be hardly worth while.

The menu for a dinner-party in a bourgeois household of the old school is almost as traditional and invariable as the manner of serving it. Soup will begin it, for hors-d'œuvres are only for lunch, as are also omelettes and pâtés and salads, if the classic rules are to be followed. When you enter the dining-room you will find the soup already poured out in plates. These soup-plates will be standing on other plates. This is because, for a reason which I have never been able to fathom, the plate from which you eat must always be set upon another, which, in fact, you never use, for you never get to it, as new plates are always being put on to it.

It may be added that the large supply of china, which these ceremonial traditions require, is not always accompanied by a corresponding supply of cutlery. In a modest *bourgeois* household, although your knife and fork will certainly be changed after the fish, whose taste might otherwise be communicated to the meat dishes, you may be expected to retain them throughout other courses until the cheese, and you will even be given a *porte couteau* on the side of your plate, on which to rest them.

As for the fish, it cannot be of any kind. It must be *bar*—the large sea perch or bass which is esteemed such a delicacy in France, but is almost unknown to the English table. *Bar*, which is often eaten cold, with mayonnaise, must, for dinner-party purposes, be served hot, with hollandaise sauce. Then follow calves' sweetbreads and spinach, leading up to *gigot bretonne*, or leg of mutton with flageolet beans, which is a very much more delicately-flavoured and succulent dish than you may suppose.

At lunch the *plat de résistance* may be preceded by a cold *pâté*, but only rarely at dinner. There will follow Camembert cheese, and after that—not before it—the invariable *bombe glacée*, or iced pudding, which is always sent in from the confectioner's, whatever else may be made at home. To finish up there will be fruit.

Tradition will govern the manner of serving as well as the composition of the meal. At every course the dish will be handed round, and the guests will help themselves. If they do not appear to do so sufficiently liberally, the host or hostess will press them. Before the next course, every dish will be solemnly handed around the whole table a second time, and guests will again be pressed by their host to take a second helping, which, however, is fortunately not obligatory.

Around wine there is a ritual in England as well as in France, but the French ritual is different. On sitting down to dinner—remember I am speaking of the traditional *bourgeois* dinner-party—the guest will notice a whole array of wine-glasses in front of, and not to the right of, his plate. As the dinner proceeds he may begin to wonder why he was supplied with so many, because there will be no change in the wine until well after half time. Until then the only wine will be in decanters upon the table. There will be red wine and white wine, but neither will have a name or a year, or will have any pretensions to being anything but a *vin de table*. They will both be light wines, but there will be no offence in making them even lighter by the addition of water. With the joint, however, a burgundy will make its appearance, and be poured from its own bottle. With the cheese will be served a heavier and finer burgundy. The entrance of the *bombe* is the moment for the dessert wine, which may be a *muscat* or a *Frontignan*, but will be much more in

the tradition if it is a champagne, and, of course, a sweet champagne.

There are many other wines in France, and magnificent wines. According as your host comes from one part of the country or the other, has a vineyard himself, or gets his wine from a relative or a friend who has one, not only will the nature of the anonymous table wine vary slightly, but the list of the *vins fins* will be modified. He may give you a *château* wine of the *Médoc* if he is of that country; an *Arbois* or a *Château Chalon*, if he is from the Franche Comté; a *Vouvray*, if he is from Touraine; a *Châteauneuf-des-Papes* or an *Ermitage*, if he is from the lower valley of the Rhone; a *Turkheim*, if he is from Alsace. The classic wines for a *bourgeois* dinner-party are, however, those that I have mentioned.

There are other occasions than dinner-parties when tradition demands that wine shall be offered in France. In England when a man wants to get you to hear him make a speech he persuades you to take a ticket for a public dinner—except at election times, when you can listen to him for nothing. In France he sets out a table with a white cloth upon it, and when he has finished talking he asks you to drink champagne in the middle of the afternoon. He calls it '*sabler le champagne*', and the wine is drunk in honour of some person or persons for whom the complimentary speech has been made—for of course it has been complimentary.

In the middle of the afternoon, too, you will be offered wine at the reception which succeeds a wedding. It is called a '*lunch*', but it is never before three o'clock that the guests will have finished passing along that carpet in the vestry and shaking hands with the line of relatives, ending with the bride and bridegroom, who will have been drawn up there, in ceremonial order, by the *Suisse*.

It is only a little later in the afternoon that you will again be offered wine, when you attend a *gouter*, which your hostess may unfortunately be persuaded by recent anglicizing fashions to call a 'five o'clock'. Her rage for what is foreign may even have taken her so far as to offer to supply cocktails, of which, unfortunately, many poisonous examples are made in those Parisian drawing-rooms which claim to be modern. But into that provincial France—whether it be in Paris or the country—of which I am trying to give a picture, they have hardly penetrated, as indeed why should France, of all countries, tolerate concoctions which destroy the palate, both for good food and good wine? What you will be offered will be port, which in France, is considered to be an aperitif, or appetizer, and not a dessert wine. There will also be tea and coffee, as indeed there will also be lemonade, orangeade, and perhaps other *sirops*; but there will certainly be port. These various drinks, as well as the many cakes and sweetmeats which accompany them, will not be carried on a tray to be placed upon a small table in the drawing-room, but will be set out in imposing array in the dining-room. Nor will the male guests be expected to hand cups, sugar, cream cakes, and eatables to the ladies. On the contrary, it is the ladies who will hand these things to them—at least it is the unmarried girls of the household, with voluntary assistance from any other *jeunes filles* present.

Almost as important a ceremonial occasion as a wedding is a funeral. I have said something about the printed invitations, or *faire parts*. The funeral processions themselves, with relatives and friends on foot behind them, still hold up traffic in the most crowded streets of Paris, and they take precedence over all else, though the introduction of the motor-hearse is gradually breaking down that rather painful tradition. What flourishes as

strongly as ever, on the other hand, is funeral oratory. Whether the deceased is a public man or the head of a commercial house, an artist or the secretary of a local antiquarian society, there will be speeches at his burial. They will be made from the steps of the church, if he was a Catholic, or at the graveside, if his funeral is strictly secular. There will be many of them, and if the dead man held any official or distinguished position, a member of the Government will be expected to make the first one. Recently, at the funeral of a certain poet, who was not even a very eminent poet, a number of elderly gentlemen stood around, bare-headed in the open air of a raw February day, and listened to no less than nineteen speeches, beginning with that of the Under Secretary for Fine Arts.

## CHAPTER VI

### MISTRESSES AND MAIDS

PERHAPS it is because so many Americans now live in Paris that the Parisians are rapidly catching up to English and American standards in household conveniences and in furniture. None of the new middle-class flats which are so rapidly being run up—and occasionally much more rapidly falling down—but is fitted with *le confort*, which in French means what an English house-agent would call internal sanitation. Most of them also have bathrooms. Many of the inhabitants of these new flats have even introduced what Englishmen mean by comfort—that is to say, stuffed easy chairs, which they may have purchased from Maple's at the time when Maple's opened their Paris shop and—pronounced in the French way—were the most advanced French fashion, but more probably from the many subsequent French imitators of what is generally known as *le mobilier anglais*. Most of them also have American roll-top desks in their offices.

These people are, however, regarded by the great mass of *bourgeois* France, and even by what is still the majority of *bourgeois* Paris, as belonging to that daring and almost disreputable coterie, which is determined to *faire moderne*, to frequent 'dancings', and to drink cocktails. There are still many houses in Paris which have no drains and some which have no water supply except at a tap in the courtyard; and although the last of the water-carriers, who delivered water from house to house, has long since disappeared, plenty of Parisians



continue to think it quite natural that when you want a bath you should betake yourself to one of the *établissements de bains*—one of them is a picturesque old houseboat in the Seine—which in each quarter still carry on a rather shabby but prosperous existence. Moreover there are people now living and not yet old, who can remember what an event was the delivery of a hot bath at a private flat by one of these establishments. The cart would arrive with the bright copper bath laid across the top of the boiler. The bath would be taken upstairs, the cans of hot water would follow it, and every one who passed in the street would say, ‘Ah, there has been a case of measles in the house.’

Moreover, while *le confort* is not yet universal in Paris, it is rare in the provincial towns, by no means all of which possess a drainage system, and in the villages it is unknown. I remember the whole local population trampling down the geraniums in the front garden of a country cottage of mine, in order to look through the window at a bath which was to them as romantic a piece of furniture as if it had been an imperial throne.

Even if bathrooms might perhaps be admitted as belonging to the irresistible march of progress, the idea that any one in a drawing-room could loll back into an easy chair would certainly not be tolerated by the old fashioned *bourgeoisie*, which is the controlling force of provincial France and provincial Paris to-day, as it has been for a hundred years. A rigid tradition continues to govern the furniture as well as the disposition of the enormous majority of *bourgeois* flats in the large towns and *bourgeois* houses in the small ones. There will be a dining-room, furnished in the *style Henri II*, which means that of the French Renaissance as interpreted by several generations of cheap furniture dealers in the Faubourg Saint-Antoine. There will be a buffet, in

the lower half of which will be kept the dinner service, while that for dessert will be lodged behind the glass doors of the upper. There will be a *suspension*, which means a hanging lamp—electric, gas or oil, as the case may be—over the dining-room table, and from it will be dangling a neat little electric bell. There will be chairs, whose woodwork is excessively ornamented and whose seats are of imitation stamped leather. Thousands of little French dining-rooms are exactly like this.

Glass double doors will open from the dining-room into the drawing-room, where the neatly arranged furniture will be Louis XVI—unless, indeed, it be Louis XV. The drawing-room will never be entered except on ceremonial occasions. Its Louis XV—or Louis XVI—furniture will, on all ordinary days, be concealed under linen covers, and its chandelier protected from flies by being wrapped in a hideous and half transparent material; while the doors will probably be locked, even if the family is so pressed for space that the son has to sleep on a truckle bed, put up every night in the dining-room. Only once a week, on the *jour* of Madame, when she ‘receives’, will the drawing-room be opened up.

Both of these rooms will also have glass doors, giving on to the always narrow vestibule, which has no other access to the daylight. They are the only sitting-rooms in nearly every French flat. On the other side of the vestibule will be the kitchen. To say that the kitchen is cramped would be to give far too spacious an idea of it. The amount of skilful cooking that can be done in this ridiculously restricted space is amazing, and amazing also that the French servant should be content to live and work in it.

I have said the French servant, for the number of people, even comfortably off, by French standards, who keep more than one servant is very limited.

The great majority of middle-class French people live very modestly, and spend a far smaller proportion of their income on rent than would people of corresponding position in England. Indeed, nobody in France spends anything on that kind of display—whether it be house-rent or servants—which is considered necessary in England to the keeping up of a position. In France they save the money instead. With regard to rents in Paris, it is only since the war that the town has become crowded. Until then, not only were flats easily obtainable and rents low, but almost everybody lived on merely verbal tenancy agreements, made usually with a landlord, who himself inhabited the house and himself collected his rents.

The one servant, who is the complete staff of most French families, has no time to be idle, and is not idle. Perhaps that is why she is satisfied with her tiny kitchen, for she never has any time to sit down until she goes upstairs to her room on the sixth floor at night. It is an odd and in many ways socially dangerous custom, that of herding all the servants from all the flats in the house into bedrooms on the top floor, cold in winter, directly under the burning hot roof in summer, removed from protection as well as supervision; but such a force are tradition and habit that few French servants would exchange it for another. It represents a measure of freedom, as does the morning marketing, and as also does the knowledge that only a week's notice need be given on either side.

However, there is another kind of freedom in the relations between mistress and maid in France. There is no standing at a social distance between them. It is virtually impossible to find a servant in modest *bourgeois* circles in France who 'knows her place', as it is impossible to find a mistress who expects her servant to wear any kind of uniform.

The attitude of a servant to her mistress in France, as that of almost every one to every one else, is one of frank social equality, of politeness and even of ceremony at the proper moment, but of easy cordiality rather than subdued respect. She is helping rather than serving, considers herself entitled—as she is always ready—to offer suggestions, and even the criticism which no one of French blood can restrain, is full of conversation, rather noisy, but on the other hand not in the least likely to refuse to do anything because she does not consider that it comes within the work for which she was engaged. The *bonne à tout faire*—*b.à.t.f.* in the newspaper advertisements—does indeed do everything. She sweeps and cooks and washes up and sews, and even takes charge of a part of the weekly laundry, which she soaps and rinses and hangs up to dry and irons in the same tiny kitchen. Her mistress, on the other hand, even if she is of a social standing at which, in England, she would probably never enter the kitchen at all, can do and sometimes does all these things also—supervises the cooking of the more important dishes, washes and irons her more delicate garments, makes and mends many of her own clothes.

When a French family feels justified in enjoying the luxury of more than one servant, it is nearly always a married couple which is engaged. Both in Paris and in the country there are many more married couples in domestic service than in England, even though the valet in black and yellow striped waistcoat, with black cotton sleeves survives only in Palais Royal farces. In Paris, the wife will be the cook and the husband will do the work which a housemaid and a parlourmaid would do in London. In the country, the man will probably look after the garden as well. Whatever the division of labour, however, it is always considered that cooking represents

at least half the work of the whole house, and the other half is considerably reduced by the fact that it is only among the very rich that there exists the conception of the servant as a personal attendant, to be summoned at will.

It must not be supposed, however, that the importance given to the kitchen means that the French do not keep their homes clean. There is, on the contrary, as severe and precise a tradition of domestic as there is of personal cleanliness, and both date from long before the time of bathrooms or patent carpet-sweepers. Much of the domestic cleanliness is based upon sun and air. No country housewife will neglect to hang the mattress and the bedclothes half out of the window in the sun. No *femme de ménage*—she is the charwoman—in Paris but will throw open the windows wide before she begins to sweep or dust a room. She will even shake your carpets out of the window, which is not always to the benefit of those who are living below, especially if—as is very likely—they happen to have their windows open and to be doing their house work at the same time. However, unless, at the same moment, you also receive the dust from the carpets of the people who are living above, you may be sure your room will be cleaned.

It will also be polished. Everything will be polished, but more especially the floor. The polished floor is an important feature in the most modest *bourgeois* flat in Paris ; for even if the place be tiny, it will have an oak parquet floor throughout—except in the kitchen, where there will be tiles—and the upkeep of the floor is one of the chief prides of a French *maîtresse de maison*. It will be swept and waxed and polished every day ; but now and then it will need a more than usually thorough treatment, and the services of the *frotteur* will be requisitioned. The *frotteur* may be the husband of the *concierge*, or

of somebody else's *concierge*, and he spends his days reviving parquet floors, while in the evenings he waits at dinner parties. The floor reviving is a most vigorous process. It consists in scratching off the old wax, and the dirt that is in it, with *paille de fer*, or metal shavings, which are attached to the feet of the *frotteur*. Afterwards he once more waxes the floor, now several tones lighter, and polishes it with a brush which, again, is attached to the foot.

I have tried to give an impression of the domestic arrangements of the kind of family which may be said to represent the majority of fairly successful professional men, officials, soldiers, lawyers, doctors, writers, intellectuals—men whose incomes, from one source or another, allows them to live at a rate of not more than £400 a year. That rate may seem low when it is judged by English standards, but many Frenchmen, of acknowledged position, live on considerably less. It need hardly be said that there are some professional men, successful advocates, for instance, who earn much more, and many business men who earn much more still. It is they who engage 'modern' decorators to do up their flats in Paris, so that they are not so very different from English or American flats; who have numbers of servants and entertain largely, in Paris and in the country, in the English or American way; who look and dress almost like Englishmen or Americans. However, although they are in the limelight in Paris and are to be seen at all the best restaurants and at all the *répétitions générales* of new plays, these men do not represent the modest middle class which is really France. I am thinking of the kind of man who not only wears a round hat—he calls it a *melon*—with a black cutaway coat, but might even be guilty of wearing brown boots with it; who not only puts on a 'smoking' very rarely indeed, but perhaps does not even possess one, now that evening dress is no

longer the proper wear for official occasions in the day time ; who is not only proud of the Legion of Honour in his buttonhole—every Frenchman is of that - but is even almost as proud, in a country town, of the *Palmes Académiques* or the *Merite Agricole*. He is very neatly dressed, in clothes whose cut is not of the smartest, and if he is already an elderly man, they are black. Again, if he is elderly, his stand-up collar will be low, and his little black tie will almost be as thin as a bootlace. If he is rather younger, he may own a car, but it will be no more important than a Citroen, and in Paris he will travel by omnibus or *Métro*, rather than by taxicab, cheap as Paris taxis are. He will even wait for another bus or tram rather than pay a little more to go into the first class compartment, which exists in both. That is the kind of man who not only occupies most of the responsible posts under the Government of the Republic, as he calls it on official occasions, but is the guiding spirit of French life both in Paris and in the country. It is the kind of man whose modest and very quiet life, both in Paris and in the country any one must understand who hopes to understand France.

## CHAPTER VII

### THE VILLAGE AND THE CHÂTEAU

THOSE who are accustomed to the winding roads of England, bordered by hedges, and looking over a landscape which is dotted with farmhouses and cottages, and also with the country homes of the wealthy, will have a shock when they first travel across France. The road is in long and straight stretches, which you can sometimes see before you for miles, going up and down hill, like the perspective of a switchback railway. The effect of monotony is increased when you are traversing acres of forest or crossing the wide expanses of that almost treeless tableland, which the French call the *plaine*, and which, for all its agricultural wealth, is in arid contrast, not only with the woodland, but also with the smiling valleys. There are, in the greater part of France, no hedges to give variety or a touch of the unexpected to the landscape, and no cottages or farmhouses to strike a human note, until you come to those which are grouped in what, to an Englishman, seem to be the comparatively rare villages.

Even the villages themselves have both an inhospitable and a miserable air. No front gardens to the cottages. Hardly a flower to be seen growing anywhere, except perhaps an occasional geranium on a window sill. Not only do the houses themselves show unwelcoming blank walls, but the whole village seems to be turning its back upon the visitor, and the back looks as if it were considerably out of repair. Although the road will narrow itself to pass right through the busy centre of every little town,



the villages seem to be only willing just shyly to touch it, and even then to be on their guard against it. The church, as often as not, will be tucked up a side street, behind a sheltering line of houses, and although the wrought iron gates of the old château boldly face the invader, even they are frequently set back in a part of the village through which the *Route Nationale* does not run.

One of the first impressions, indeed, which one gets of country life in France is that each little community is rallied to resist possible attack, and that each individual house is prepared to defend itself, not only against strangers, but even against the man next door.

No doubt there is something left of the tradition of danger in a lawless land. No doubt that was one of the reasons why the farms came to be grouped in villages instead of being isolated, why the French countryman has shutters to all his windows and closes them securely at night, why the entrance to the smallest farmyard is through a heavy door, which can be securely barred, why there is a high wall to enclose the whole group of buildings and why all the rooms open on to an inner courtyard, around which all the active work of the farm itself is done.

There is something else, however. It is the peasant who expresses in the highest degree that exclusive family sentiment which is so characteristic of France. To him, even more than to the *bourgeois* of the town, the Frenchman's home is his castle—a castle into which he not only has little desire that any one not belonging to the family shall enter, but into which he would even prevent the stranger from looking. The townsman, who insists that all his windows shall be shaded with lace curtains, shuts himself in no more resolutely than the peasant, who refuses that any one shall peep, not only into his

house but into his farmyard ; and even when he is sufficiently ' modern ' to have replaced the great oak doors by pretentious, hideous and gaudily painted cast iron gates, the open work of these gates is always lined with sheet iron to a sufficient height to make it impossible for anyone to look over the top.

The tradition of joint defence was no doubt what brought the farms together into the villages ; but there is another motive which keeps them there to-day, for each one is so much a fortress within itself, both materially and morally, that they have few mutual ties. The motive is that every farmer has little bits of land to look after at different points all over the area of the *commune*, and he can get at them all more easily if he lives at the central point of what he calls the *chef lieu* of the *commune*, that is to say, the village. For the peasant farmer is only rarely a tenant farmer. Even when he is, he pays his rent in the form of a share of the crops ; but he is much more often a peasant proprietor. He owns the land which he farms. He has inherited part of it from his own parents. Part of it his wife has brought him as her *dot*. A little of it he may have bought, though there is never much land that is worth farming to sell, except in certain parts of the country, where the population has seriously diminished. His property is made up of a lot of scattered little pieces, which he spends his life trying to exchange with his neighbours, in order to make a more homogeneous whole, but rarely succeeds in altering, for each side in such bargains always holds back because he thinks the other man is getting the better of him. They are always little pieces, as French law requires that an inheritance must be divided equally among all the children ; and although the more energetic member of a family may succeed in buying out his brothers and

sisters, and although the larger properties are often kept together by deliberately limiting the family to one, the smaller ones tend to become smaller still, and you will find the hedgeless French countryside composed of enormous fields, alternating with tiny little strips.

Putting aside those exceptional districts, where there are great farms, conducted on commercial and scientific lines with the latest machinery, the typical French village consists of a number of peasant farmers of various degrees of prosperity, but all working themselves in the fields from sunrise to past sundown, to wring the last drop of profit out of their own land, and doing so with machines and methods which have hardly altered since their great-grandfathers, except that occasionally an enterprising young spendthrift has installed a motor engine to work a pump.

Moreover, the important thing to remember is that in the typical French village there is virtually nothing but the small peasant farmer. There are hardly any agricultural labourers, for it is rare that the peasant farmer employs any one but the members of his own family, all of whom, men and women, boys and girls, he works to the bone. There are absolutely no middle-class residents. There may be a country cottage, to which a Parisian brings his children to spend the long summer holiday, but which he merely leaves locked up during the winter. There may be a château, to which the owner will come down occasionally, and especially for the shooting, if he is rich, but in which he lives all the year round only if he is poor, and cannot afford to do otherwise. In the latter case, he may take so much part in the corporate life of the village as to be its *maire*, and consequently its official representative, but he will certainly not feel the kind of responsibility towards its inhabitants, which any one

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of a corresponding class will naturally assume in England.

There will doubtless be a *cure*, who keeps very much to himself, except to perform directly religious duties. There will be a couple of cafés, one of which will probably also be a very modestly supplied village shop. If the village is more than five miles from the nearest little town, there may be a baker, a butcher, and a blacksmith ; but if not, the baker's cart will call, and all other supplies will be fetched from the town on market day, when the whole village will put up its shutters and go to market, to sell as well as to buy.

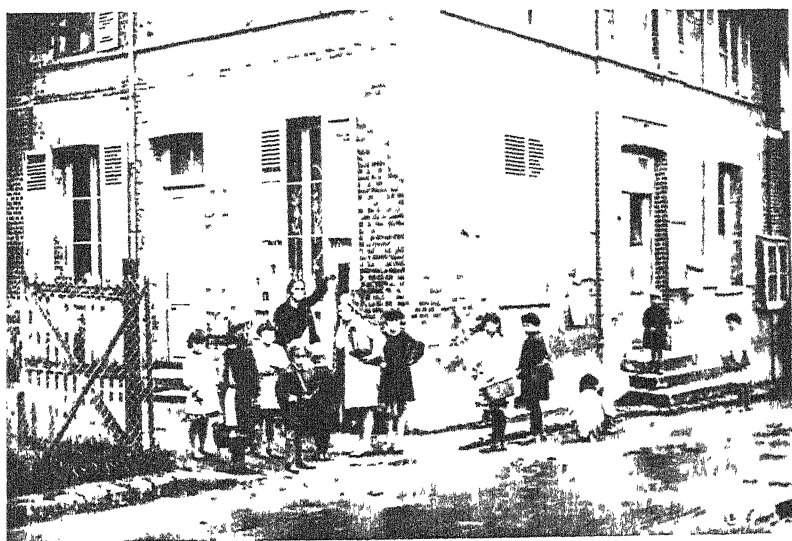
French country society can only be understood if it is realized that it consists exclusively of small peasant farmers. There is no middle class whatever. There are no little country houses, inhabited by cultivated people living on moderate incomes. Such people go to live in the small towns. Near the big towns there are certainly people who live in suburbs, which are almost the country, but they live in the suburbs merely because it is cheaper to do so. They would much prefer to live in the tiniest flat in the centre.

In the real country there are old families, still clinging to their old châteaux ; but if they cannot afford to go away and spend most of the time in Paris, their life is almost as simple as that of the peasant farmers themselves. They do not entertain. Although the word ' week-end ' has crept into the French language, it means that the townsmen, with their wives or their mistresses, spend Saturday and Sunday nights in one of the many pretentious *hostelleries*, which are springing up along the main motor roads. It does not mean staying with friends. The comfortable country house, inhabited by people who live in the country because they like it, having friends to stay with them, entertaining and calling

upon their friends in the country, helping to organize the social life of the working class in the village, busying themselves with their own flower gardens and those of the villagers, reading the *Field* or their novel from a circulating library in the evening, simply does not exist. Nor, indeed, does the circulating library, which is almost unknown in France, and the very name of which is a sort of spectre to frighten novelists into thinking that they are going to be robbed of their author's fees.

The situation is, in fact, a curious paradox. Paris is full of men filling high places in the intellectual, social and political life of the country, who are only a generation away from the peasants and who still have the minds of peasants. They will even come back to live in the country in their old age; but, except in the summer holidays, they do not feel any desire to go back and live in it while they are young. In fact, it may be noted that, even when they do eventually leave Paris and retire, it is generally to a small country town and not to a village that they will betake themselves, unless a small family property ties them to the real country.

There are still old-fashioned and aristocratic country gentlemen who live in their châteaux. You can see them and their wives and daughters once a year at the *Concours Hippique* in Paris; but, like everything else that is aristocratic in France, they are like a picturesque but pathetic survival from history. Even when they can afford to do the thing in style, their relations with the peasants are no longer what they used to be. Much later than the Revolution, and even up to our own time, the châtelain could still use the paternal *tu* in speaking to the men of his village. Few could do so to-day. The final separation of Church and State may have had something to do with the change. The war may



THE VILLAGE SCHOOL WITH THE MAIRIE NEAR DOOR



BARGAINING FOR A LIVE RABBIT AT A COUNTRY MARKET



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have had something more. Certain it is that the situation is no longer the same.

Difficult as things are, however, for those châtelains who can still afford to spend money, they are much harder for the majority who cannot. Many of them are very much worse off than their own farmers, who, in spite of the manual work which they do in the fields and the rough and even dirty conditions in which they live, have made a lot of money in the last few years, and have, many of them, bought motor-cars, which stand in the open barn beside the farm carts. One can even sometimes see a saloon car being impressed into the service of bringing in the hay.

The châtelain, on the other hand, may have a magnificent eighteenth-century château, with a great park. Over his fine wrought iron gates there may be a coronet, and a splendid drive up to his monumental front door; but the gate posts can often be seen to be in need of attention, the lead on the roof sometimes lets in the water, the stables, with the names of the horses still painted up over the stalls, are generally empty. He and his family are possibly living in three rooms of the château, which has no bathrooms and is lit by occasional tiny oil lamps, and his whole staff for the estate very likely consists of a man and wife for all the housework, another couple as gardener and dairymaid—the gardening being, of course, entirely devoted to vegetables and economy—and a third couple as gamekeeper and laundrymaid. Indeed, I know of a large château, where the owner and his family live and keep up the estate with no larger a staff.

There must be many others, for the château class has been hard hit. The peasant has made money, but the peasant is generally his own landowner, and little of his profit has found its way into the pocket of the *seigneur*. It is very unlikely, on the other



land, that the latter should own the urban ground rents with which so many country estates in England are kept up; for urban property, like all other, is much more subdivided in France, and the owner of a house in town is, moreover, nearly always the owner of the land on which it stands. If the châtelain has to live, as many have, on what his country estate can bring him, he will devote himself, partly to farming his own land and partly to marketing the crops which he receives as rent from such tenants as he has. He will possibly be tempted, however, to live upon part of his capital, by selling the timber, of which a large part of so many French estates consist, and much of the forest which adds to the beauty as well as the wealth and even to the climate of France is disappearing in this way.

Naturally, there are also châtelains who have other resources to enable them to keep up their estates, and some who make a profitable business both of agriculture and forestry. However, even when they really spend most of the time in the country, they, who could afford to do what some others could not, take no such share in helping to organize village life, as people in a corresponding position would do in England.

There is, in fact, no organization of village life, as it would be understood by Englishmen. The parish room, the village library, the women's institute, the boys' club are all absolutely unknown—at least in the village, though many *curés* in towns organize boys' clubs of a distinctly religious and moral and improving character, which, characteristically enough, are called *patronages*. In the village, each separate family in each very separate little farm is left to its own resources. This is no doubt partly due to the absence of any sense of responsibility on the part of the man who lives in the château with

regard to the social life of the village, but it is also due to a very vigorous resentment on the part of the man who lives in the farm against any one who would presume to interfere with his private affairs. Benevolent patronage in social life would be as bitterly repulsed as canvassing would be at political elections. Keen as is the interest of the Frenchman in politics, no busy candidate has ever yet dared to call upon him and ask him how he is going to vote, and that anybody, of any class, in his own village should think of coming to interfere with his liberty in such a way would be to him frankly incredible. Political meetings, which exist chiefly to heckle the candidate and frequently end in a row—yes, as many as you like; but canvassing, never. In any case, no one has ever thought of suggesting it.

There are generally only two other people in the typical French village, who are not peasants. They are the *curé* and the school teacher, or *instituteur*, who may be an *institutrice*. I have bracketed them together, but they are very often at daggers drawn; for the *instituteur* is the State-appointed master in the secular elementary school, and while there is nothing to prevent his being a Catholic, he much more probably is not, and in any case he is not allowed to give any religious teaching. Moreover, he generally ekes out his small salary from the Government by taking a still smaller salary from the municipality of the village for performing the duties of *secrétaire de mairie*. The *mairie*, where the *cadastre*, or official map of the village and its landowners, and other official papers are kept, is always in the same building as the village school-house. Every *commune*, rural or urban, is a municipality in France, and has, not only its *mairie* but its municipal council, who are elected and unpaid. It also has its *secrétaire de mairie*, who is one of the two paid officials of the municipality,

the other being the *garde champêtre*, or village policeman, generally a very ancient farmer, who would probably be quite incapable of taking any decisive action, and, if any such action were necessary, would certainly wait until the arrival of the two mounted *gendarmes* from the nearest town. The *garde champêtre* also acts as village crier, and, in that capacity, calls attention to his news, not by a bell but by a side drum.

Now the *instituteur*, in his educational capacity, must ignore the existence of the Church. In his municipal capacity it is quite likely that he will do so also, if the municipal council, as in most cases, has a Radical majority and has elected a Radical peasant farmer as *maire*. If, on the other hand, the *maire* is the châtelain, the *secrétaire* will probably be a Catholic, and the village relations between Church and State will be cordial. They are, to be sure, never likely to be very bitter. The attitude of the average Radical peasant farmer is that he is anti-clerical on principle, but would never think of not being married or buried by the Church, even if his anti-clericalism goes so far as to prevent his going regularly to Mass. There are the traditionally Catholic families in the village, and there are the families whom the Catholics call *fortes têtes*, because they are opposed to the Church in politics; but even the latter would probably send their children to do their First Communion, and every one takes part in such village ceremonies as are Catholic.

To go so far as to admit the interference of the *curé* in the daily lives of the inhabitants would, however, be another matter, and neither socially nor morally has the village *curé* any position corresponding with that of the country parson. He is, indeed, a rather lonely figure, and that not merely because he has no wife or family. He is even more terribly underpaid than most people in this country,



M. LE CURÉ ADDRESSES THE OLD PEOPLE AT A FESTIVAL GIVEN IN THEIR HONOUR IN THE  
MICHIGAN COUNTRY



where every one is underpaid ; for the Separation Law of 1906, which cut off his emoluments from public funds, left him to depend entirely on private Catholic support. He is lucky if, with all extra fees included, he can earn as much as 500 francs a month, or just four pounds. It is no doubt for this reason that there was, until quite recently, and still is in a less degree, a serious shortage of candidates for the priesthood. The peasant will no longer send his son into a calling which was, at one time, a comfortable living, but is now far less than he could get from the land. At the same time, there has been, since the war, a remarkable increase of young priests, who are drawn from the intellectual classes, and if this increase is maintained, it may have a very definite effect on the social as well as the religious life of the French village.

There is, of course, much more to be said about the difference between the ways in which religious and social life interlock in England and are separated in France. In the village, the *curé* is indeed comparatively isolated, but he is more a part of the social life of the community than he is in the towns ; for he is part of a tradition so ingrained that it is impossible quite to break away from it. In the towns the Church is far more active ; but so are its rivals, and so are its enemies. In an English town social convention makes it almost impossible for a man to declare that he has no religion, though he may betray the fact by his behaviour. In a French one atheism is often professed as passionately and as openly as Christianity. In England the social and political enemy of the Established Church is Nonconformity. In France the Catholic Church, which, if not established, represents a very definite social attitude, and even a class, finds itself opposed to those with whom certain Radical or Socialist political opinions are inevitably allied with a militant

secularism, if not atheism. It seems incomprehensible to the average Frenchman that an English Socialist should also be a Christian, and perhaps even a member of the Established Church. As for the Protestants in France, they have a peculiar position. Numerically unimportant, they are politically very powerful, for they are chiefly composed of a compact, middle-class, town-dwelling *bourgeoisie*, able and influential in business, finance, and public administration and occupying many of the important posts in government and affairs. The typical Catholic would throw them into the same bag with atheists, Jews, and other unbelievers, who may be and, probably are, Freemasons, which the Catholics never can be. In any case, except for a few places which have historically Protestant traditions, neither Protestants nor Jews enter very much into village life, where the antagonism is between the *bien pensants*, the thorough Catholics, and those Radical anti-clericals, who would probably be fervent atheists in town, but who are baptized and married and buried by the Church in the country, and—though they fluniate against the *curé* in the village café and will vote anything on the *conseil municipal* which would be likely to annoy him—are not really very deadly enemies.

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE VILLAGE AND THE PEASANT

THE French villager is the peasant farmer, the *cultivateur*, as he would officially be described, and as he would describe himself, and nearly all the houses in a French village are little farms. To look at these farms you would imagine that all the farmers are in the most lamentable state of poverty, and you would probably see no reason to revise your opinion if you penetrated into the house where the farmer lives. You would find very little regard paid to the amenities of life, to its comforts, or even to mere order and domestic cleanliness. The essential things—cooking utensils, bedding and so forth—are kept clean enough, and the degree of personal cleanliness of the inhabitants is much higher than might appear from the patched, stained, and ragged clothing in which they pass the whole of their lives excepting Sundays. The French peasant farmer on working days certainly has no regard for appearances. However, if the things that matter most are cleaner than they seem, the disorder, discomfort and griminess of the single living-room suggest a very low degree of civilization and material prosperity. Chickens not infrequently invade the kitchen and render the daily washing of its tiled floor fully necessary, while the cows are not far away, and the manure-heap is in front of the door. Exactly where it will be placed, and in front of which door, varies according to the district. In the North it will be a semi-liquid mass occupying an excavation in the centre of the courtyard, with stone or brick paths around it to enable the doors of the various



buildings to be reached without wading or falling in. The manure-heap in Lorraine will be found in front of the main entrance, and the village street is lined with manure-heaps on either side, each indicating its little farm.

The small farmer, in fact, lives entirely for farming. He thinks only of his land. His land is an obsession to him. It is more. It is a religion—his only true religion, even when he is a Catholic and goes to church. He takes no leisure except on Sunday—and not always then for the whole day—and except when he goes shooting, or spends a very occasional hour in the village café, or takes part in a rare family or village festival. He does not waste time or money growing flowers in his garden, which is devoted only to vegetables, the gardeners of the family being almost always the women. He never reads a book. And yet—this is another paradox—it is from the class of the small farmer that the intellectual vitality of France is really drawn. The number of people who read books is amazingly small, even in the towns, and even in the towns there are virtually no public libraries, such as there are in England and America. The writers and thinkers are a small élite, appealing to a public which is itself a small élite, but writers and readers alike have their roots in the soil.

The truth is that the flower is a very different thing from the roots. The French peasant is in many ways a different person from the intellectual or artistic townsman, whom he himself produces in no more than two generations. He is far from being artistic, and he is certainly not intellectual, though he is intelligent. He is not quick. He is not impatient. He is not gay, as the townsman is gay. He does not enjoy himself over his work, as the townsman enjoys himself, and you will certainly never hear him singing over it, as you will hear the



AN OLD PEASANT WOMAN



townsman singing. He will not insist on having his leisure, as the townsman will insist. The only thing about him which tells you that he belongs to an old civilization is his rough but still delicate courtesy.

The French peasant is dour, and he is cunning. I have said that he thinks only of his land, but it would be more true to say that he thinks only of the money that he can make and save out of his land. It is thrift which keeps him from growing flowers in his garden. It is thrift which makes him work in old clothes and live in domestic discomfort. It is thrift which prompts him to refuse to repair his farm buildings until they tumble down, as it was thrift which made his father build the walls of wattle and mud, instead of employing a mason. It is thrift which causes him to hesitate to adopt any labour-saving machinery. It is thrift which leads him to work himself and his family to death rather than employ hired labour; for he is certain that he will never get his money's worth from any labour which has not his own fierce incentive to put fifteen hours of effort into ten hours of work. It is thrift which inspires his wife herself to pick up firewood in the forest or herself to collect green food for her rabbits by the wayside, though she may be rich enough to buy up the *seigneur* in his château.

For the French peasant farmer, in spite of his aspect of poverty, is rich. He will go on looking poor, even though he has bought a little car, and though sabots and black blouses and those high black caps with a little American cloth peak to them are gradually, but slowly going out. He has no desire to look prosperous. He merely wants to be prosperous; and he is, in spite of all appearances. It is he who supplies the almost limitless reserves which are always available in France for investment, and have been lost in dishonest or foolish speculation

all over the world, instead of making their country the richest among nations in realized wealth, as she still is in habits of thrift. Those ragged, muddy, unshaven peasants in a French village are men of property. One will own a block of flats in Paris. Another will have put his savings in mortgages. All will possess packets of now worthless Russian bonds.

There are no workhouses in France, and there is no unemployment. I do not say that the national tradition of thrift is entirely responsible either for the one fact or the other, for the lack of man-power is the principal cause of a situation which enables the individual labourer to be comfortably free from competition, though it may make the nation weak. Moreover, the absence of workhouses is partly due to laws, which make the family legally responsible for the maintenance of its infirm and its aged, and which direct public charity, on the rare occasions and to the limited extent to which it is given at all, chiefly to help this maintenance at home. Consequently, although there are *hospices* for old people, for whose support no individual can be made responsible, grandfathers and grandmothers, who are given little tasks to perform in return for their keep, are regular features of the chimney corner of every French homestead. It is not entirely from filial kindness and tradition that they are kept there, but because, even when they are not themselves the legal owners of the family property, they are a legal charge upon the family.

Nevertheless thrift is still a very important element in the absence of any real poverty behind so many appearances of it. Some people are saying to-day that the French in general and the French peasant in particular have lost their habit of thrift. Do not believe them. There may have been some who announced wildly that they would abandon it,

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in that desperate hour when they found that every one of the francs which they had been saving up for the daughter's *dot* or the son's education to a profession was now only worth twenty centimes, after having for a still more tragic moment been worth less still. Tradition and habit were too strong, however, and the Frenchman is now saving the paper franc just as carefully as he saved the silver one.

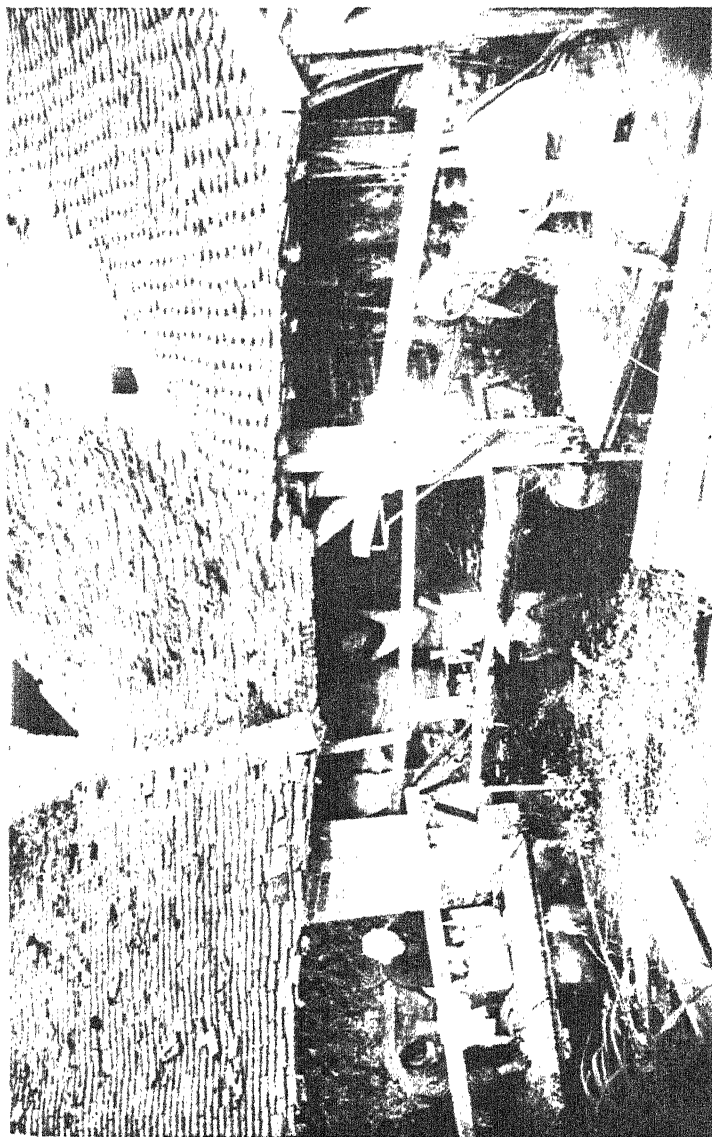
As you reach the centre of a French village, after having passed the gates leading up to the château, you come upon the *place publique*. In England you might call it the village green, but it is something less and something more—less in size but more in a certain formal dignity and in the fact that all the principal buildings will be grouped around it. There is the church, sometimes in the middle of its cemetery, but sometimes standing alone, while the cemetery lies, surrounded by its wall, on the outskirts of the village. Monumentally the cemetery is on the whole less pretentious and consequently less heavily lugubrious a place than it would be in an English village or even in a French town, for memorials to the dead are not among the few things which will induce the peasant to loosen the strings of his heavy purse; but the wreaths of wire and enamel which are hung over the simple crosses give it a tawdry look which is inseparable from all French graveyards.

In front of the church will be the aggressively new and nearly always ugly piece of sculpture which the village has erected to its war dead. The way in which a very few family names are again and again repeated on the roll of honour shows how close and how firmly rooted an organization the village community is, but the monument is not otherwise interesting. Nor is the village schoolhouse and *mairie* combined, built probably in those two colours

of sallow brick in which French Government architects appear to be determined to show that France is no longer a country possessed of artistic taste. The village green itself is more attractive. Across it there will probably be a *mail*, or mall, of formally clipped and low-growing limes or plane trees, often very old, and in a corner there may be a pond, with its *abreuvoir* or watering-place for the horses to walk into the water, and, if there is any running water at all, the covered but otherwise open *lavoir*, where the women of the village will kneel at the edge of the stream with the week's washing, which they beat and soap and beat again with a wooden instrument which looks like an enlarged butter-pat.

Looking upon the *place publique* also will be the two cafés. There are always two, for in every village there must be at least two parties. One of the cafés will hang out a sign like two tin cones, joined at the broad ends, which shows that it is the Government tobacco shop, and that it alone is licensed to retail not only the Government's tobacco and cigars, but its matches and its postage stamps. One of the cafés, and perhaps both of them, will also be a little general shop. Neither its stock nor its accommodation for customers will be large. It will sell sardines and coffee and sabots and candles and a few of the very simplest groceries; but the choice will be very limited, for, after all, everybody goes to the town on market day, and nobody in the village would have very great confidence either in the quality or in the moderation of the price of what anybody else living in the village can have to sell.

Not that any one in the village would have a much greater confidence in what is offered for sale in the town. Like the highwayman in Vanbrugh's play, he distrusts some people because he knows them and some because he does not know them, and



THE OLD WASH HOUSE OVER THE STREAM





his suspicion and dislike of *étrangers*—among whom Parisians are hardly less remote than real foreigners—are as great as his antagonism towards the known wiles of his own neighbours. In the town, however, you can choose your shop, and compare its prices with those of several other shops before coming back to spend your two francs thirty-five centimes.

It is on the *place publique* that the *brûleur*, or Government distiller, takes his stand, when he comes, once a year, to turn the juice of the plums or the cherries or the mirabelles or whatever the fruit-crop of the village may be into spirit. The proceedings are naturally conducted under very close official supervision, as is the growing of tobacco plants. No one may have a tobacco plant, even as an ornament to his garden—supposing any one in France to be so wasteful as to use such a plant for mere ornament—without declaring it to the proper authority. An inspector will come and count the leaves, and you will have to show that you have paid duty on every one of them except the small percentage that you are allowed to retain for your own smoking. In the same way you must pay duty on all the spirit distilled from your fruit, except the similar percentage which, if you are a genuine grower, you can retain for your own drinking.

It is on the *place publique*, probably against the walls of the *mairie*, that will be fixed, at election times, the large and rough boards, boldly numbered, one to each candidate, on which alone the programmes and often violently personal declarations and denials and accusations of the party representatives may be posted. It is on the more permanent municipal notice board, at the *mairie* door, that will be shown, not only the usual official announcements, but those large bills, which contain, in small type, the full text of some speech made by a Minister in

the Chamber of Deputies. I have often wondered whether anybody in the village ever reads such a spectacle as which the *affiche*, in every commune in France, at enormous public expense, has been voted by acclamation in the hot enthusiasm of a parliamentary debate. I have certainly never seen a villager standing in front of the board and straining his eyesight over such a task. Perhaps the mere appearance of this compact block of printed matter informs the peasant that there is an important machinery at work and that something is being done up in Paris, but I am not at all sure. His general attitude towards all governments is that he likes that one best which leaves him most completely to himself and taxes him the least, and there his interest in the matter ends. The peasant is patriotic, but it must be remembered that the word *pays*, which to the Parisian means France, to him means his village. 'He lives at the end of the *pays*,' he will say, in order to show you the way to a house which is on the other side of the village, and it is not much farther than the *pays*, in this limited sense that his patriotism really extends.

This special kind of patriotism may even be found expressed in the relations between local and central government in France. The commune, the municipality, be it village or town, is a self-governing, independent unit, over which, in theory and very largely in practice, there is very little control from any superior authority; and that independence is jealously guarded. With regard to any larger administrative area, there are the direct control and interference of the central Government, exercised through the prefect, in charge of each department or county, and his sub-prefects, in charge of each district, all of whom are directly appointed by and directly responsible to the Ministry of the Interior in Paris. Many as are the varieties of local custom

## THE VILLAGE AND THE PEASANT

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## CHAPTER IX

### VILLAGE FESTIVITIES

LIFE in a French village is not often gay, and it is often grimly hard, but it is hard in an entirely utilitarian way, and not on any puritanical principle. For all the fierce energy with which he keeps his nose to the grindstone the French countryman still does possess, deep down in his character that capacity for gaiety which blossoms so much more freely in the townsman and now and then he gives rein to it.

There are certain family and village festivals at which he socially lets himself go, and for some of which he hospitably spreads himself. By far the most important of these is a wedding. In all classes in France a wedding is a social occasion, which lasts well beyond the actual ceremony. The ceremony itself is important enough. Indeed, for all those who are not rigorously agnostic there are two ceremonies. There is the civil marriage, which alone is legally binding. It is performed by the *maire* of the commune, or by the deputy *maire*, or *adjoint*, in the municipal building, and is little more than the official registration of a contract, perhaps with the addition of a short speech from the *maire*, if he happens to know either of the parties, and, although gratuitous in itself, is followed by a collection for the poor from among those present. As for the contract, it is probably drawn up by a *notaire*, with elaborate safeguards for the *dot* of the bride or the property of the bridegroom, or, if there is no written contract, and the bride has no property—which is hardly thinkable in a village—the marriage will

The image shows a single page of a document that is extremely faded and illegible. The text is mostly lost to the background, appearing as faint horizontal lines and scattered characters. There are no discernible words or structures that can be transcribed accurately.

no solemn procession, and the French call its simplest expression. The service is not a very imposing or very highly-dressed affair. Old-fashioned very short, black broadcloth frock coats replace the smart morning coats and white waistcoats which are now worn in town instead of the once obligatory evening clothes. Although there will certainly be a *quête*, or collection for the poor, the *démoséole d'honneur*, or bridesmaid who makes it, will not be led around the church by the hand with the same courtly formality by the *garçon d'honneur*, or best man, as in a wedding in Paris. There is no formal reception in the vestry, with the bride and bridegroom and their respective families lined up by the side of a carpet, along which the guests are passed to offer their congratulations.

Nevertheless, even in a village wedding there will be ceremony and formality. The bride will have her veil and her wreath of imitation orange blossom, which she will afterwards keep under a glass shade on the mantelpiece of her bedroom for the rest of her life. Moreover, the subsequent festivities in a village wedding are far more important and far more

prolonged than they would be to-day in a town. In a smart wedding in Paris they would come to an end with what is called a *lunch*, but is really a refreshment table with sandwiches and champagne, at about three in the afternoon, much as a wedding would end in a similar reception in London. In Paris, in a wedding of a more popular kind, the whole party, on coming out of the church, would get into a large closed motor-coach, tastefully upholstered in pale grey, and be driven off to some suburban hostelry, where feasting and dancing and singing would continue until a late hour of the evening. The motor-coach would even be fitted with a piano inside, so that no time should be lost in getting to merriment on the way out, nor should there be any anticlimax on the way home.

The same tradition governs a village wedding, but it is carried on much longer. In the smart society of Paris the proceedings are over by tea-time. In the *bourgeois* society of a provincial town, where the bride's father probably hires the principal hotel for the purpose, they only end—as they used to do in Paris—with a ball, which goes on into the small hours of the morning and from which the bride and bridegroom escape secretly about midnight. In a village they last for two days and two nights.

A marriage is not only the great event in the lives of the bride and bridegroom, but a great event in the lives of every one related to them. A man not only marries his wife's family, but a woman marries her husband's. A marriage is not only the union between two village families, but between two village properties, for it will hardly ever happen that either family has more than one child to divide up the inheritance. It may mean to one or other of the fathers that he can now run his plough across a little strip of land which for years has separated two







## VILLAGE FESTIVITIES

The first of these is the wedding. It is a very important event in the life of the village. The bride and groom are usually from the same village, and the wedding is a great occasion for the whole community. The bride is usually a young girl, and the groom is a young man. They are both dressed in their best clothes, and the bride is usually wearing a white dress. The wedding is usually held in the village church, and the ceremony is usually performed by the parish priest. After the ceremony, the bride and groom usually go to a reception, where they are surrounded by their friends and family. The reception is usually held in a large hall, and there is usually a lot of food and drink. The wedding is a very important event in the life of the village, and it is a great occasion for the whole community.

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Perhaps it is more true to say that they feasted, for although no one would call it having enjoyed himself, and although there were many dances and many songs, the position soon reached at which the affair became a struggle against the desire to fall asleep. A great thing to be able to say that the feast kept up until late. 'How did the wedding of Roland?' I asked one day of the father of the bride. 'Splendidly,' he answered, 'We went to bed until three o'clock after the first two o'clock after the second.'

It must not be supposed that these

take on the character of drunken orgies. The guests certainly eat too much, but although every one is merry it cannot be said that any one is drunk. They eat partly because the table has been loaded with food in order to show that the giver of the party can afford it, and partly because there is not much else to do. The meal—or rather the series of meals—may have been brought along by the pastrycook from the nearest town, who has a wide experience of such things; but his experience and his customers are mainly in *bourgeois* circles, where hired waiters, in the proper black dress clothes and white ties, are considered essential. It is more likely that the feast in the village has been cooked and served by a couple of neighbours, who, before coming back to the land, kept house for years for the family living in some château, and know how these things should be done; and, as they are friends of both families, as soon as they have cooked and served the meal they sit down at the table and help to eat it.

Weddings are by far the most important of the family festivals, but christenings and funerals have their place too, and so has the First Communion of a son or especially a daughter, with its two days of family festivity as traditional as those of a wedding. At all of them the proper etiquette is observed; for we may be rough peasants, but we know *les usages*. We send out *dragées*, or sugared almonds, to the relatives after a christening, and the *faire-part*, in which the date of a funeral is announced, is drawn up in the proper form, on behalf of all the relatives by name, and sent out in the proper large envelope, with its very wide black border. The village widow will know how to burst into tears whenever her late husband's name is mentioned up to exactly six months from the date of his demise, as well as any town widow. The village burial may not be conducted by a 'contractor of

funeral pomps'. There may be no such gorgeous trappings and plumes to the hearse and its horses as in town, no black curtains, heavily bordered with white or silver, to the *chapelle ardente* in which the coffin waits in the vestibule of the house before it is taken to burial. In the village there may be none of these usual accessories to funerals in towns, and there may be no speeches by the graveside; but a procession—the men and the women walking separately—will follow the body decently to the grave. Indeed, so much importance do the peasants attach to a considerable following on this last journey that many of them belong to *confréries* or *consoeuries*, which are not only insurance funds for funeral expenses, but pledge every member to walk behind the bier of any other member who may die with his or her subscription fully paid up to date. These associations, by the way, are very ancient, and some date back to the thirteenth century.

These associations, it may be mentioned, also encourage a less mournful kind of comradeship. For once a year each of them meets in one of those *banquets*, which are windfalls to one or other of the village cafés; and the guests are proud to read in next week's issue of the local paper that 'a succulent repast was assured by the devoted attentions of Monsieur and Madame Deval, the justly popular proprietors of the Café du Progrès'.

Another great *banquet* of the year is that of Armistice Day, which emphasizes the fact that in spite of political opinions and voting almost solid for the return of a Pacifist and Anti-Clerical member of the Chamber, the only feasts which really appeal to the imagination of the peasant are those connected either with the Army or the Church. The dinner—which is, of course, a luncheon—of the *Anciens Combattants* on November 11th is indeed a surprising evidence of this fact, for nothing less warlike can

well be conceived than the kindly and tolerant, if close and stubborn, farmers who sit round the board and revive their war memories.

There is another military festivity, though it cannot exactly be described as one of rejoicing. That is the patriotic demonstration, made on the evening of the *conseil de révision*, by the two or three boys of the village who have been passed by that official body as fit to set out shortly for their period of military service. There are kept at the *mairie* an old tricolour flag, two bugles, and the drum used by the *garde champêtre* as village crier, and these stage properties are placed at the disposal of the two lads, who have just come back from the town, their buttonholes adorned with the enormous red, white, and blue badges, with gold fringe, which are sold outside the meeting place of the *conseil* to those who are to be trained for the defence of their country. The boys have already had as much to drink as is good for them, but they will soon have more. They will march round the village, blowing the bugles and beating the drum, and they will visit one café and then the other and then the first again. They sing very loud, and they are very patriotic, but they are obviously unhappy. It is almost the only time that I have seen anybody drunk in the village, and it is the only time that I have seen such a state tolerated by village opinion.

Among religious festivals, which are regularly observed by the village, are, firstly, the midnight mass on Christmas Eve ; secondly, the procession, singing and surrounding the *curé*, to the *calvaire* by the roadside at the top of the hill on the *Fête-Dieu*, which is Corpus Christi day ; and, thirdly, the ceremony when the children of the village take their First Communion, and the little girls of ten and eleven look so charming in their long and full white muslin dresses and their veils, their white cotton

gloves, and their crowns of flowers. On these occasions, the banners, the baldrics, the surplices, the birettas, the tall candles, and not least the *suisse*, in his gold-laced coat, cocked hat, and brass-headed staff, suggest that the church must be very fully staffed; but every man in the procession, including the *suisse* himself, and excepting only the *curé*, is, on working days, a rough peasant farmer or perhaps the keeper of one of the two village cafés.

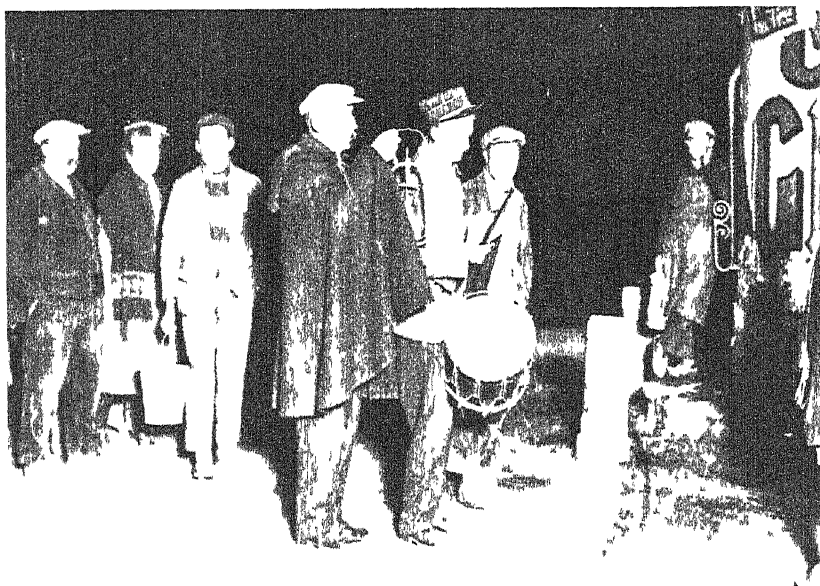
If we put aside the *Fête Nationale* on July 14th, which in spite of its official celebration in towns and its popular tradition of dancing in the streets in Paris, is, in the villages, no more than a day which must legally be workless, the most important festive occasion of the year is the annual *fête du village*, which is usually held on some day in July, and possibly on the day of the village patron saint.

The exact when and the how of the holding of the fête is discussed at a special meeting of the municipal council—or, rather, of the councillors composing it, for it is not an official affair—which *monsieur le maire* calls to examine the question. The meeting will nominate a *commission*, consisting of a couple of the farmers and perhaps of one of our two *débitants*, or innkeepers. There will probably be the three senior members of the *conseil municipal*, who are honourably entitled to see their names in print and to have a hand in allotting the contract for the tent and the band. The *commission* then proceed to appoint their sons and nephews as *commissaires*—active young men who will do the real work in return for the importance of having their names in print too, and of wearing rosettes and getting hot and dusty and officious on the great day in their best clothes—which will still be black in most parts of the country, but have become a heavy and hairy kind of tweed, or brown or green corduroys in some. Of course, in time, these young *commissaires* will

inherit the farms and the cafés and themselves become members of the *conseil* in their turn.

The first step will be the collection of a fund for the expenses. To this fund residents will be asked to contribute according to a strict maximum, determined by what they have contributed in previous years, and *étrangers*—which, as I have already explained, means Parisians spending their holidays in the village as well as real foreigners—according to a minimum which their own sense of the absence of any title to be in the place at all is expected to fix pretty high. These latter contributions, however, which are solicited with politeness but without humility, give no sort of right to a patronizing attitude on the part of the giver. France is a democratic country, and nobody in any big house will be asked to perform an opening ceremony or to give away prizes. France is also a secular country, and the *curé* will not be asked, nor will he offer, to take any share in the organization, though there is no objection to his coming to the fête if he likes. He will certainly not stay away from it, on the other hand, on the ground that it is held on a Sunday, for even the religious part of France is not sabbatarian, and Sunday is the regular day for all the amusements of the people, from race meetings and football matches to theatrical performances.

The programme, when it is printed in due course and posted in our own and the adjoining communes (one copy to each—why waste money?) is boldly headed '*République Française*', and is signed and countersigned by the *maire*, the *adjoint du maire* and the members of the *commission*, with the authority of each fully set forth and certified, as is the manner of all public announcements in legal-minded France. It is a noble programme, printed by the weekly paper of our market town with that



THE TOWN CRIER AND HIS LANTERN BEARER



PEASANT MUSICIANS OF AUVERGNE CARRYING THE "VIELLE"  
AND THE "BINIOI"





mixture of many founts of type and that profusion of fancy rulings and other flourishes which are affected by local printers in all countries. It is given an additional gaiety by the fact that it is on paper in which red fades into blue and from blue into white—plain black on white is only used for purely official purposes.

From this programme we learn that there will be two days of rejoicing—though experience tells us that the Monday will be a bit of an anticlimax. There will be country games—mostly of a comic character—for the young men, the maidens, and the children. There will be a shooting competition, a *concours de dominos* for those of more advanced years, and a *grand bal parqueté*. The parquet turns out later to consist of very uneven floor-boards merely laid upon cross pieces on the grass of the *place publique*, and covered by a tent; but the words look splendid on the bill. The music will be supplied by the *Orphéon* of the little town, who possess several brass instruments, from which they are capable of developing considerable power. It is the *Corps des Pompiers* of the same town who will treat us to a *retraite aux flambeaux*, or musical torchlight procession, in the evening, to remind us, no doubt, that if ever we have a fire it is from them, three miles away, that we have the only hope of mechanical appliances or trained assistance in putting it out.

The *Corps des Pompiers* is, indeed, a typical feature in French provincial life. It is made up of volunteers, about whose competence in fire extinction I should be a little doubtful, but about whose willingness to turn out on every ceremonial occasion, in uniform and wearing their very brightly polished brass helmets, there can be no question. The very name of them has crept into literature and art as symbolical of everything that is *bourgeois* and

demonstratively conventional. They themselves look like a survival from the time of Louis-Philippe, and I fear that many of their methods and their instruments must date from that period also. Having assembled on the occasion of our village fête, they actually went so far, before setting out to visit us, as to have a real practice with the fire-engine, which they dragged out of its little hutch on their own *place publique*. This practice, carried out under the direction of their own *maire*, resulted in the saving of the winter leeks in his garden—for they were suffering sadly from the drought—making four delighted small boys wet to the skin, and revealing serious defects in the engine itself; but it led to no further action, and it will no doubt be after the next fire that the machine will be repaired.

On the morning of the fête it was already evident that this was no ordinary Sunday. Never had so many heads in curl-papers been seen in our own and the surrounding villages. It is true that although on the printed announcement we had been *invités à pavoiser*, the only flags to be seen in the village were the two which are brought out of the *mairie* on every occasion of official rejoicing and stuck into the two little sockets, which form a 'V' over the door of every *mairie* in France as they do over the front of every motor-omnibus in Paris. It is true that the '*illuminations*' promised on the same programme were found to be reduced, when evening arrived, to four Japanese lanterns on a string over the same *marrie* door. However this disinclination—absolutely normal in France—to spend money unnecessarily did not mean that the village was not ready to enjoy itself.

After dinner—that is, by one o'clock—farm-carts begin to come in, the space occupied by the live pig or calf under its rope netting on market days

being now filled with kitchen chairs carrying the ladies of the party, in their best—a best which is, alas! no longer traditional peasant dress. The *chevaux de bois* have already begun to turn. The sweetstuff booth is already selling nougat and hot gofers, made immediately and to order, over a portable charcoal fire. Practice has already begun in the shooting gallery. Business is already brisk, not only in our two regular inns, but in three other houses, which have hung fir branches over the door to indicate that they have taken out a temporary licence to *faire café* for the occasion.

Soon the games begin. For a prize of twenty francs the young men try to pick up things with their mouths from the *marmite diabolique*, which is filled with soot, and they tilt at the *bains russes*, which upset pails of water on the heads of the unsuccessful. The young maidens, who, until a fairly advanced period in the day, remain in a compact group apart from the young men, court ridicule less crudely. Blindfold, they try to cut hanging ribbons with scissors. The small boys race in sacks and wheelbarrows. The little children fish with rods and hooks into a lucky bag. Every one does something to make every one else laugh, on the principle that the older you are, the less you do and the more you laugh.

When the torchlight procession is over, and the *Orphéon* has marched home with the *pompiers*, dancing is continued to the music of a fiddle and a large, oblong, rectangular concertina, both operated by village and of course amateur executants. The two bugles and the side drum, which have been brought out from the *mairie*, supply a rather desultory accompaniment. There seems to be a constant flow of wine—it would be beer or cider in other districts—a great deal of merriment, but virtually no drunkenness. Even when the old

people and the women and girls have gone to bed, and the young bloods follow tradition by making a night of it, the dissipation is surprisingly innocent. With the bugles and the side-drum they try the echoes from every point in the village through the night. Then they follow tradition once more, for they march over to the next village, which has always been rather a rival of ours, and buy a goose. At breakfast-time on Monday morning I met them marching back, singing and still blowing the bugles and pattering on the drum. They looked valiant but sleepy. The goose, poor bird, which was being led along the road with a string around its neck, was bewildered. In the afternoon they were to tie it up and shoot at it—again for a prize of twenty francs. In the evening they were to eat it; but by that time they were much too tired to blow any more bugles. So the village slept once more—until next year's fête.

## CHAPTER X

### THE LITTLE TOWN

ONCE a week the whole village goes off to market. The two cafés are closed. The farmers bolt and bar their heavy doors, and put up the shutters on their windows. Chairs are placed in the high two-wheeled farm-cart or in the little motor *camionette*, which is gradually replacing it. Under the hood of the cart or the motor will be seen packed the whole family except the grandparents and the children, the men in their newest suits of corduroys or fustian, and the women in black and wearing unaccustomed hats—of thirty years-old fashion—towering above heads, which on every other day of the week go bare.

The whole cavalcade sets off to our market town, which is not only the market town, but the administrative, social, judicial and professional centre of the whole district. It is the administrative centre, because there are the *Sous-Préfet*, our only official link with the central Government in Paris; the *gendarmerie*, which is a military body, and reminds us that France is kept in order by the Ministry of War; the *Percepteur*, who collects our direct taxes; and the *Receveur des Contributions Indirectes*, to whom we pay the fees for our shooting, motor-car, and many other licenses. It is the judicial centre, because there is the *Tribunal*, which consists of three judges, a *Président*, and two assistants, and tries civil cases as well as such minor criminal offences as would in England come under the Police-court. Under the *Tribunal* there is also a *Commissaire de Police*, who prepares the *dossiers* of these minor

criminal cases and brings them up before the Court.

It must be remembered, of course, that the unpaid magistracy, which is the backbone of the aristocratic organization of the country-side in England, does not exist in France. The judges of the local *Tribunal* are paid. So also is the *Juge de Paix*, who is quite a different person from our justice of the peace, and sits in quite small towns, which are hardly more than large villages, as well as in the larger ones, to judge minor offences and claims for payment of debt. The only unpaid magistrates in France are the judges in the *Tribunaux de Commerce*, of which more than two hundred exist to try purely commercial cases in certain of the bigger towns, and are directed by business men, who are elected for limited periods.

It must also be remembered that the whole French judicial system provides a network of appeals. There are twenty-seven district appeal courts, and, above them, the final appeal to the *Cour de Cassation*; so that the French, who are perhaps the most litigious people on earth, have plenty of opportunity for carrying their cases from one court to another.

The market town is much more of a professional centre than it would be in England. If the peasant wants a doctor—it is very rare indeed that he runs to such wicked expense, either for himself or for any member of his family—it is to the market town that he goes to find him, for a doctor would starve if he tried to make a living in a village. If the same peasant wants a veterinary surgeon—which is much more likely—it is from the market town that he will fetch him also. It is in the market town that he will go to see his *notaire*, to draw the interest on his mortgages, and to arrange about the purchase or sale of a bit of property or the sharing out of an

inheritance which has just fallen in to him and his brother, or the drawing up of the marriage contract of his daughter. It is in the market town also that he will find his *avoué*, whom he will want to consult about that civil action against his neighbour over a boundary line.

In the market town he will also want to go to his bank. It will not be to pay money into an account there or to draw money out, for the peasant has not yet got over his disinclination to trust his cash to any one, and still keeps it under the mattress, while his wife, as likely as not, keeps another secret store—secret even from him—under another mattress or in some other hiding-place. He probably has no current account at the bank at all. He goes there to draw his interest on the Government and other securities which he has bought with savings that he will entrust to no banker, and possibly to buy new securities with new savings. The bank on market days is full of farmers and their wives carefully producing coupons and carefully pocketing the dividends in exchange for them.

It is in the market town, again, that, on one of the rare occasions on which he has launched out on a piece of building, which will probably be an additional barn, the peasant will find the representatives of the many trades, with each of which he must deal separately in regard to the construction. For, unless he has been so lavish—which is very unlikely—as to employ an architect, he must make separate bargains with the mason, who does no more than the brickwork and the plastering; the *charpentier*, who puts in the beams; the *menuisier*, who supplies the doors and windows; the *couvreur*, who completes the roof; the *plombier*, who runs in the water-supply; and the *fumiste*, who looks after the stoves and the chimneys. The 'builder and contractor' of England is an unknown person in



France. The owner, or his architect, must look after the co-ordination of all these separate but interdependent tasks and all these individual and indeed often conflicting personalities.

Above all, the market town is the social centre. If there is no middle-class society in the village, there is plenty in the market town. It is full of tiny little houses, in which live retired tradesmen from Paris, or civil servants from Paris or elsewhere, or professional men. Small as the town may be, it is pretty sure to have an archaeological society and several other societies of the same kind, and to have quite an active little intellectual life, to which not only the *retraités*, but the practising professional men who are brought together in the town contribute. The market is also a social centre for the peasant. He comes first of all for business, but he combines business with a certain amount of pleasure. It is on market day that he meets his friends from other villages ; and though he is much too economical to eat any meal except at home, and the midday *déjeuner* at the hotels is patronized chiefly by the dealers who have come to rob him, he can get quite a lot of social enjoyment out of the time passed over one drink in a café, or even out of a stand-up talk in the market-place, without wasting money on a drink at all.

The market town is also the only place where the villager can go for any relaxation or entertainment. He will not find a library or a reading-room there, any more than in a village, nor will he find anything in the nature of a club ; but he will find a cinema, he will find an occasional circus and even the rare visit of a theatrical company, who act in a tent, for there is not often a theatre, and he will find a choice between one or two cafés, which, without being described as gay, are rather more fully lit than the single room, with its smoking oil lamp, in the village.



A PEASANT AND HIS WIFE



Moreover, most of these little towns now contain—it is a very modern and daring innovation—some little hall, where young people who would like to dance can, at least on Saturday and Sunday nights, indulge their frivolous desire for doing so.

However, the countryman has come to the market first of all for business. He has come to buy all sorts of things which must be made to last the week, from meat and groceries to a visit to the barber's. I do not mean that he will often pay to have his hair cut. If he indulges in such a luxury at all, and is not content with what his wife can manage in the back yard, it is a ceremony which is solemnly performed twice a year—at Easter and at All Saints. I mean that it is on market day that he will have a shave, when he considers one to be necessary ; and indeed I have known a man make a special journey to the market on Monday in order to be unusually smart for a wedding that was to take place on the following Saturday.

The peasant has come to the market, above all, to sell. He will stand for hours beside his two or three sacks of potatoes, waiting for the price below which he will not let them go, and he will bargain for twenty minutes to obtain that price. In the part of the market where his wife has paid to the municipality for her seat on one of the little wooden benches which are placed in rows, she will wait in the blazing sunlight or the driving rain for an equal number of hours, and will perform miracles of ingenuity to find out what the woman two places away has asked for the very various contents of her basket. That basket will contain all sorts of things—the produce of the garden, asparagus or apples or raspberries according to the season, seedling cabbages or lettuces for planting out, a couple of pounds of butter, a dozen eggs, a terrified live rabbit, an

equally uncomfortable pair of live chickens, their feet tied together, and offered, with the utmost but apparently unconscious cruelty, heads downwards, to a buyer, who will carry them away, still alive and still heads downwards, for later killing.

There are also the stalls of the professional dealers, who have provided themselves with awnings against the elements; the cheesemongers, the fruiterers, the pork butchers, the rare fishmongers, the market-gardeners, some of whom have arrived by rail or road and regularly work other markets in the fifty-mile radius on other days of the week, others of whom have their shops in the town itself, but do not neglect on that account to have their stall on the market.

Then there are the cheap-jacks, who follow every market and every fair: those who sell enamelled kitchen vessels so much cheaper than in the shops, and who seem to find customers in spite of the fairly obvious quality of their wares; those who spread out a pile of gaily coloured handkerchiefs upon the ground; those who dazzle the feminine buyer still more effectively by trays of tawdry jewellery, all of which, at the end of the market, is packed away, in an incredibly short time, into boxes of sawdust, and loaded up into a little motor-van by a dealer, who seems to have found that business is best done in a costume like that which is usually associated with a lion-tamer.

Another corner of the market has been appropriated, in the last few years, by the agents of firms who sell motor-cars. The motor-car manufacturers have recently been working very hard at exploiting the peasant, and even invade the villages with travelling caravans of cars, which, if they probably do not effect any immediate sale when they stop for half an hour on the *place publique* in front of the church, doubtless prepare the bucolic mind for the

acquisition which is eventually made in the market town.

So, on market day, from every road that leads into the little town, there is a stream of farm carts and little motor vans. Of course they are stopped at the *octroi*, where the municipality takes a toll on all consumable produce brought within its limits. The stream will go on, past the railway station, towards the market square in the centre of the town, where the carts will put up in one of the large and adjacent inn yards, which this weekly income has saved from destruction.

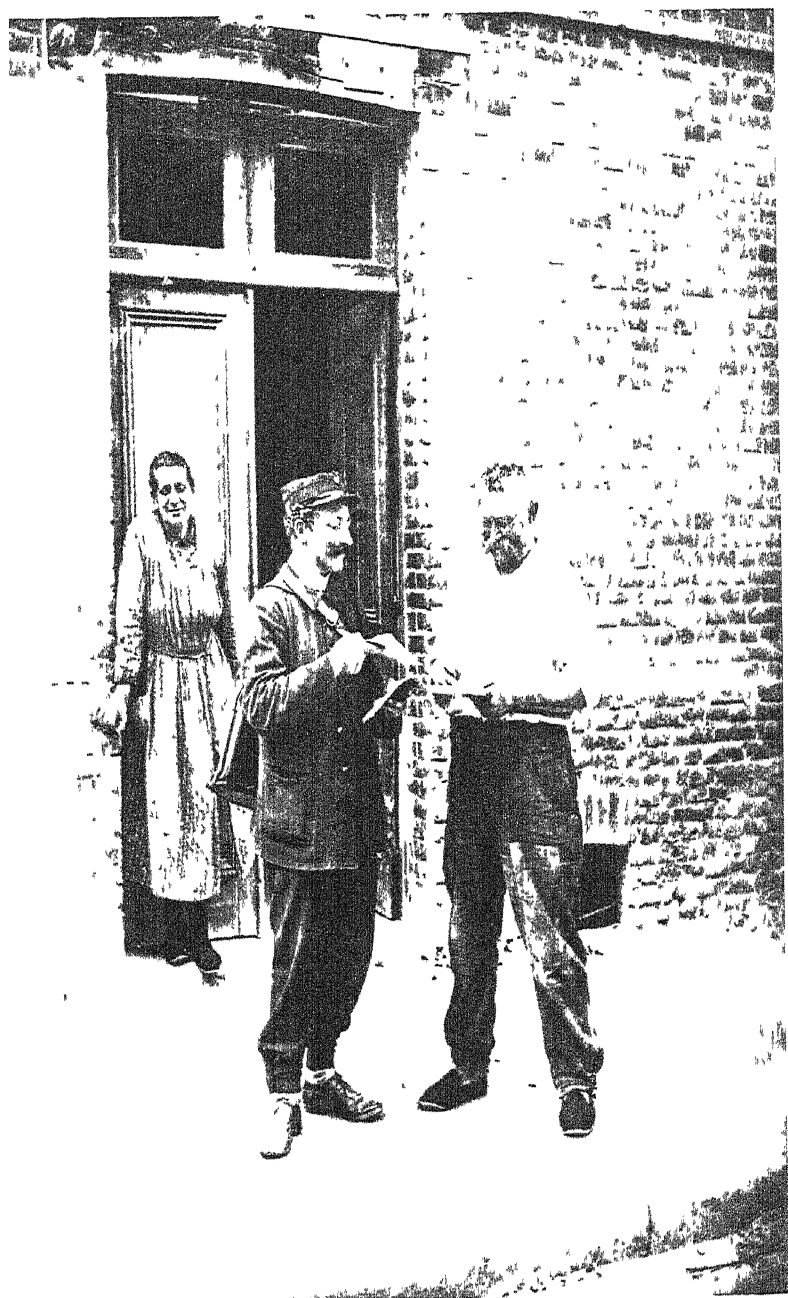
What are the characteristic things about these little *Sous-Préfectures*—for a small market-town is nearly always a *Sous-Préfecture*, just as a large market town is nearly always a *Préfecture*? The first is that in the great majority of cases they are nothing else but market towns. I can think of several within sixty miles of Paris, that have no industry whatever. In another there is a very small glass factory, recently established, but already in financial difficulties, and a still smaller factory of wheelbarrows, which employed only a dozen men and is now in bankruptcy. The great majority of those inhabitants of the town who make anything at all are the saddlers, wheelwrights, carpenters, blacksmiths, basket weavers and so forth, whose output goes to the surrounding countryside and no farther. The rest are either bootmakers and tailors or butchers and pastrycooks, all supplying the countryside with what they produce, or else they are tradesmen, selling to the countryside ironmongery and other things that are produced elsewhere.

I lay emphasis on this point because such towns, which are quite common in France, have become quite rare in England, and would hardly be conceivable within an hour's train from London. I

do not say that they are universal in France, which has always had certain industrial districts, and has developed quite new ones, such as the Seine Valley below Rouen, since the war. However, in France at least they remain typical

One result of this is that there are many little towns in France, which are quite prosperous and certainly cannot be said to be decaying, but which do not develop. In the little town which I know best there are hardly any new houses and certainly no new quarters or suburbs, and there are no slums. Without being dilapidated, all its buildings are old, some so old that they go back to the fifteenth century and earlier, and an antiquity dealer is glad to get hold of one of them and hang out a pretentious wrought-iron sign to advertise his very doubtfully old furniture—to visiting Parisians, of course, for the peasant only recognize the value of antiquities as things to sell. Others, without being medieval, have the comfortable and pleasant proportions of the Directoire and the Empire. Hardly anywhere is there one of those blatant constructions—modern without being modern architecture—which can so easily kill the reposing effect of the sleepest town. There is indeed an enterprising establishment, which calls itself the *Nouvelles Galeries*, and sells crockery and soap, and hairpins, at prices which ‘defy all competition’, and it has inserted large plate glass windows into the ground floor of a corner house on the market place; but you have only to carry your eye a little higher to find an eighteenth century window and an uneven tiled roof, and serenity is saved.

Serenity rather than sleepiness is in fact the atmosphere of these little towns. They are not sleepy, and on market days they are quite the reverse; but for all their noisy vivaciousness on these days and their industrious and businesslike



SIGNING FOR A REGISTERED LETTER IN THE COUNTRY





demeanour on others, they are never in a hurry. They are often quick, not infrequently excited, but never fussed.

Much of the serene look of the town is given by its trees. Most little French towns have one or more avenues of trees, and as most of the towns are old, the trees are old also. Whenever a Frenchman makes a road, he wants to plant trees along each side of it, and this habit, which makes so much of the character of the French landscape, makes almost as much of the character of the French towns. Closely and formally planted and often closely and formally clipped, these avenues give dignity and distinction even when the building themselves are not particularly distinguished.

It is in these little towns that you will find the steady stream of provincial life almost entirely undisturbed by the modern gusts which blow across the surface in Paris. Here the old-fashioned *bourgeoisie* is still in full possession, that *bourgeoisie* which is reserved, inhospitable to strangers, sufficient to itself, favourable neither to adventure nor to progress, but guardian of a culture which is still the richest thing that it has saved in all its careful economies. Here you will find in every street men who remind you of M. Thiers and women who suggest that, like Madame Cognacq or Madame Boucicaut, they could, by careful attention to economy over details, have built up great retail shops, such as the Samaritaine or the Bon Marché. There may be women in Paris who think that it is a man's business to make money quicker than his wife can spend it, but not here. Every tradesman's wife, who is of course his cashier and general manager, is scraping to save a little more and earn a little more. She will make you pay extra for the bottle in which you take away your wine or your oil, but she knows you will carefully bring it back

to get the money refunded. She may even, when she dare, adjust the prices not only to what may be supposed to be the maximum of your willingness and capacity, but also to what you ought to expect to be charged as a sort of ransom, if you are a stranger ; but she does not often dare, for it is against the law not to have prices marked.

When an Englishman enters a French post office he may be shocked to see the time wasted over a quite unnecessarily elaborate routine, and when he first tries to cash a cheque at a French bank, he may be irritated at the number of precautions which are taken, at the many signatures, and proofs of identity which must be given before he receives a waiting number to take his turn at the cage, from within which the single cashier will eventually hand him his money. He begins to understand both post office and bank when he grows accustomed to the life of a small town, and finds that there are still *notaires*, who use sand instead of blotting paper, and would not think of allowing a typewriter to be brought into their *études*, as their offices are called ; that there is a shop where walnuts are sold by the score, and carefully and slowly counted out ; and that peasants, who have come in from far and have a busy day, will wait for an hour for the privilege of paying their taxes, rather than spend the money on the two postage stamps—one is for the postage of the return of the receipt—which it would cost to send the money.

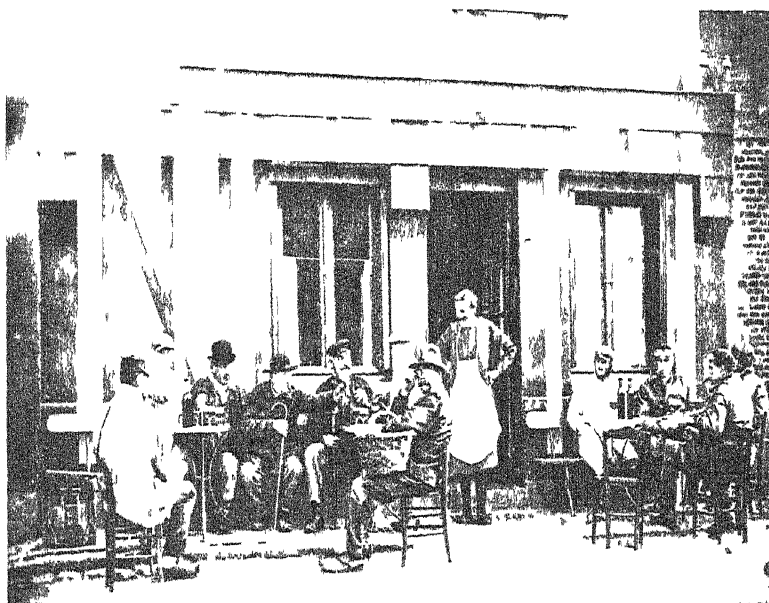
The army officer is by no means a negligible ingredient in the social life of the country town. It is generally only in the big towns that there is a garrison, but even in a small one there is generally some sort of military unit, and in any case it is from the modest *bourgeois* class, which nestles comfortably into the small town, that most of the infantry officers are drawn. For French officers,

except a few in the cavalry, are not the well-dressed dashing, aristocratic fellows with money to spend, whom English tradition associates with the commissioned ranks in the army. Their only link with the aristocracy is that they are usually Catholics, but even that not always. In the mass—and it is a large mass, for there are very many of them—they are neither smart nor dashing, but are modest, painstaking public servants, who, like all public servants in France, are, by English standards, ludicrously badly paid. Dotted about the crowd of the market place, helping their wives or their mothers to do the shopping, carrying a bundle of vegetables or a dozen of eggs, they are as much a part of the scene in the small town as the soldier in uniform on special leave—*permission agricole*—for the harvest, is part of the village scene in July and August.

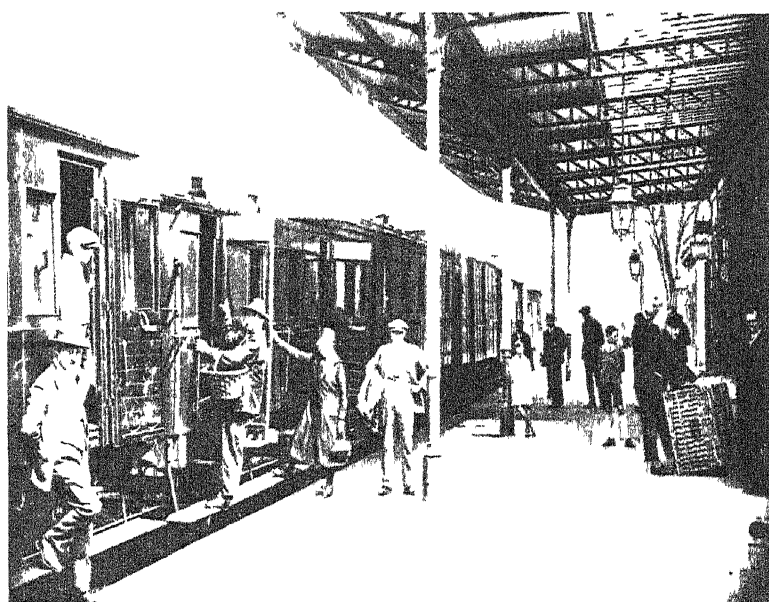
Since France returned to the system of single-member constituencies in 1928, the local Deputy has once more become the popular figure on market day that he used to be. During the few years after the war, when the Deputy was only one of a list representing the whole *département*, and little local pressure could be brought to bear upon him personally, the politicians of the country town were ill at ease, for their politics are eminently those of the parish pump. Now they are happy once more, and the Deputy is in constant demand. The fact is that he and his constituents alike regard the whole thing as a job—he as a job for himself, they as a job either for themselves individually or for the locality. He will make impassioned speeches on political ideals at election and even at other times, and they will not only come to the poll in a proportion of the total electorate—France has universal male suffrage—which is amazingly high, when it is remembered that there is no canvassing, but they

will discuss general political questions at the Café de Commerce in the afternoons with a violence which will make you think that they are ready to die for their principles. Nevertheless, to them as to him, the importance of politics lies in the pickings that are to be got out of them. For him those pickings are such as to put the financial position of a Deputy, even to an honest man, well on a level with a successful professional career, and to a dishonest man—and they are unfortunately not unknown in the Chamber—considerably higher. In addition to free railway travel and free postage for his letters, he gets—as also does the Senator—a salary of £480 a year, and many a professional man in France, where most people are content to live on so little, would be glad to have that. For the constituents the pickings are the obtaining of public appointments—underpaid, but paid—for themselves and their relatives, and the spending of public money on the neighbourhood.

It is in the little town and on market day especially that you will see the local Deputy at his most characteristic, and will understand how at least half of the life of every Minister is spent in receiving visits of parliamentarians, who come to ask particular favours for particular constituents or particular local interests. There was never any one so cordial, so devoted a friend of every one, and so exuberantly delighted to see friends whom he does not in fact recognize as the Deputy among his electors. With right hand and left hand and both at the same time, and in different directions, he is shaking hands with every one. He is ready to drink with every one, and delighted to render any one a service. Along many of the main roads of France there are light railways, twisting in and out among the trees, built at a great outlay of public money because a Deputy wanted to show that he



THE CAFE DU COMMERCE



THE RAILWAY STATION OF A SMALL TOWN



had persuaded the Government to do something for the town which elected him. Many of these light railways had become white elephants, and moss-grown at that, even before motor transport had made them almost entirely useless; but they remain as memorials of what the country thinks of politics. Politics are worth something just in so far as they bring something to the town or to any particular townsman.

As you walk through the streets of the little town, and examine its shops, you may notice several things which will give indications of its life. There will be butchers' shops, some of which call themselves *boucheries anglaises*, although I have never been able to find out in what respect an English butcher's shop in France is supposed to be different from one which is purely French. There will even be a *boucherie chevaline* for those who will not go beyond the price of horseflesh, but it will probably be in a side street, for it is not held of much account. There will be bakers' shops and *charcuteries*, which are much like those of Paris, and there will be a *pâtisserie*, which looks surprisingly prosperous for a small country town. This prosperity is due, not so much to a large consumption of cakes and pastries by the inhabitants as to the fact that its owner contracts for many of the wedding feasts of the surrounding neighbourhood, as well as for the annual *banquets* of the many societies—agricultural, musical, learned, political, or commemorative—in which is expressed the instinct of every French town for forming itself into innumerable little camps. There will be grocers, the more popular of whom will hand you a mysterious little ticket with your purchase, which tickets, being carefully collected as they invariably are, and eventually brought back in sufficient numbers, give the right to receive a *prime*, which is some small article for nothing.



There are several shops where you can buy cream and cheese and vegetables, and there is even a fruiterer of course a Spaniard or an Italian, as they all are in France.

You may possibly draw the conclusion from some of these shops that the French countryman must consume an enormous quantity of spirits, champagne, and liqueurs, for you will find bottles of them on sale, not only by the grocer, who is the regular wine merchant, but by the *charcutier*, the cheesemonger, and even the fruiterer. This conclusion would, however, be mistaken. The recurrence of the bottles in so many shops merely means that it is easy and cheap to get a licence to sell them, and as the stock improves by keeping and the sale yields a handsome profit, there are many modest competitors.

Among the shops which do not sell food you may notice two things. One is that there are several watch- and clock-makers, and the other that there is not a single bookseller. The watch- and clock-makers may be accounted for by the fact that the first article of furniture which the peasant will think of buying as an expression of his prosperity, and an evidence of his social status is a clock. What in England is called a grandfather's clock, but had gone out of fashion long before our grandfathers, to come in again among the antiquity hunters of to-day, would really have been bought by the French peasant of a couple of generations ago, and there are many of them in the farms. The modern peasant wants to hang on the wall a thing in a mahogany and glass case, with a brightly polished steel and brass pendulum, and fitted with a set of chimes which is in France called a *Westminster*, presumably because the first of them came from England and were supposed to have the full and rich tones of Big Ben.

The absence of booksellers in French provincial towns is surprising, but it is undeniable. The truth is that the French, as a nation, do not read. The cultured class, which is very genuinely and very deeply cultured, is limited. It is represented in the small towns, as I have indicated, and it is perhaps larger, even although no one buys books, than it might appear. There is a real intellectual activity maintained in France by the spoken word in a way which in other countries could only be kept alive by books, and of course the inspiration of that intellectual activity comes from those who do read. At the same time it must be recognized that the small towns, like the country, produce a population which is intelligent rather than intellectual, and, although it always includes certain studious and sometimes really erudite people, in fact contributes to the intellectual life of the country chiefly by furnishing material which is developed in Paris.

## CHAPTER XI

### SCHOOLS AND CULTURE

AS you pass along the country roads of France you will be sure to meet, again and again, an old man or an old woman leading a very young child by the hand. The association of the two ages is not merely fortuitous. There are thousands of children, of all classes, but particularly the children of working people, who are being brought up by their grandparents in villages and country towns, while their parents are earning their living in Paris or in some other place where it is difficult for them to have their children with them. They may be domestic servants, working together as a married couple in the way that is by no means unusual in France. They may be in a factory where the surroundings are none too healthy.

In a few years, when the children are old enough not to need constant supervision, they may join their parents again and be separated, with many tears, from *grandpère* and *grandmère*. Meanwhile they are passing their most receptive years in the little house in the country which their parents will one day inherit.

It is in many ways an admirable system. It is a joy for the old people, and the children benefit by being in the constant company of those who have leisure to devote almost entirely to them. Besides, there is an instinctive sympathy between old age and extreme youth, which helps much to understanding; and old age, if it has not always learnt wisdom, has generally acquired some idea of what it is.

There are other town children in the country who are not so happy. In nearly every village there is some woman who takes children to nurse, and makes a comfortable income out of the *pensions* paid by their absent mothers for the care of them—for the fathers of nearly all of these children have merely loved and ridden away. It does not follow that they are all unwanted children, though some of them unfortunately are. Much of the most devoted motherhood in France is that of *filles mères*, who spend their lives working and saving for children who will never see their fathers. What they can pay is often small, however, and the foster-mother must make a profit. The consequence is that many of the poor little things have a hard time.

Fortunately for them, they are generally sturdy little brats—not because all French children are healthy, but because it is only the healthy ones, in the working classes, who survive infancy. If the population is stationary or falling in France, one reason is that the infant mortality is high, and not that the birth-rate is low. This high mortality is to some extent due to a certain callousness, partly to that dominating obsession of property which, as I have already said, makes the illness of a cow more worthy of expert medical attention than the illness of a child, but also very largely to sheer ignorance as to how young children should be fed. One of the most surprising things in France is the contrast between the very sensible diet which is that of grown-up people and the entirely unsuitable one which is given to children.

When the village child is no longer a baby it goes daily to the *école communale*, to receive the strictly secular education, which is supplied free by the State, and for a few hours a week to the *curé* to receive the religious education which will lead up to the ceremony of the First Communion at the age

of eleven. It is between the ages of eleven and thirteen that the child tries to pass the examination for the *certificat d'études*, after which the education of a village child is at an end.

In towns it is a different matter, and the working class boy, if he is intelligent and ambitious, can, by a series of scholarships, or *bourses*, climb an educational ladder which leads to the *lycée*, or higher secondary school, and even farther. Indeed, in towns there are, from the infant school, or *école maternelle*, upwards, all sorts of incentives to competitive excellence, which are unknown in the country. There is the *croix d'honneur*, a silver cross which the little child who has had the highest average marks in all subjects in the class during the week wears, pinned proudly on to his little black school blouse, throughout the next week. There are other crosses for good conduct and for special subjects.

In the middle classes, the childhood and education of a boy or girl in France are very different from what they would be in England, and there are three things which make up most of the difference. First, the French home has no nursery; second, comparatively few children go to boarding schools; third, school education is considered to be, first and last, a matter of intellectual training and not to be a means of maintaining a social position or the opportunity of acquiring one.

The absence of the nursery has a far-reaching influence. The restricted accommodation of Paris flats is one of the main causes, both of the practice of entrusting children to their grandparents in the country and for taking them to the country for so many months of summer holiday. It also means that when they are kept in town children are brought up very largely by their parents, and in any case in the company of their parents. As soon as

they can sit up, they take their meals with their parents, and have the same food and drink (including wine) as their parents. The meals include dinner in the evening, as well as a midday luncheon, to which, it must be remembered, the head of the family nearly always comes home. Little children play noisily with their toys in the room in which their father is working or their mother receiving her guests, and nobody dares to consider their presence to be annoying. The older ones do their school preparation work in the room in which their father is reading his evening paper and their mother knitting. Although they are often handed over to a wet-nurse during the earliest weeks of their existence, they become part of the family circle from the moment they leave her hands. From that time forward they do not spend their lives with servants, and are far more the constant companions of their mothers than in England. They are allowed to have an opinion of their own and encouraged to express it. They are allowed to choose what they would like or dislike, and hardly ever contradicted or denied. They are not given to understand that children should be seen and not heard, but soon learn that if you want to create an impression in France you must make yourself heard, even if you have to shout every one else down. On the other hand, having been in the company of well-educated and well-mannered grown-up people from their earliest youth, they learn courtesy and correct behaviour quite naturally. French boys are never awkward and French girls never blush.

To be sure, French children—except the very little ones—are perhaps not very childish. French boys are not very boyish and French girls soon learn to be little minxes; but then you cannot have everything.

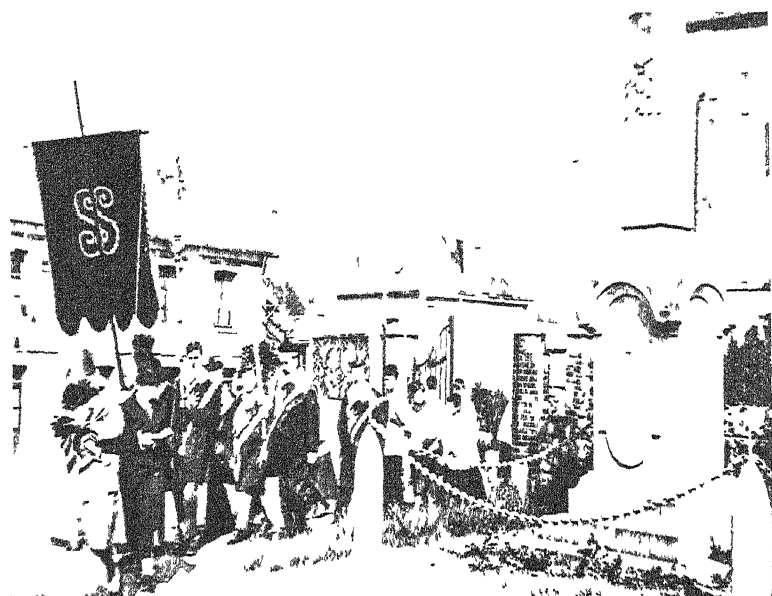
The rough-and-tumble of life which English

children learn at a boarding-school does not usually come into the experience of a French boy until he goes to do his military service or becomes a student at the university, or into that of a French girl until she is married. Of course there are *collèges* and other boarding schools for the boys and convent schools for the girls, and some parents, especially those belonging to old Catholic families, send their children there; but the education of the great majority of middle-class children, including many Catholics, is given at the secular and State-controlled *lycées*.

Until 1880 there existed only the *lycées* for boys, which date back to the Revolution. The first girls' *lycée* was founded in 1880, but the number of them has risen very rapidly since then, although it can hardly keep pace with the increase in the attendance, while the whole of university life and the aspect of the Quartier Latin is being revolutionized by the crowds of women-students.

Only a small proportion of the pupils at the *lycées* is composed of boarders. One of the reasons for this is that middle-class and professional families in France nearly always have to live on a much smaller income than people of corresponding position in England, and must educate their children in the cheapest efficient way, which is certainly keeping them at home and sending them daily to a *lycée*. They are more easily able to do this, as they live in the towns and not in the country, and in every town of any size there is a *lycée*. Consequently, the army or the university for boys and marriage for girls supply the first initiation into the struggle for life, for it is the first time that either boy or girl leaves the mother's leading-strings.

Then the initiation comes with a rush, and boy or girl has to learn to swim by being thrown suddenly into deep water. The absolute freedom



A PROCESSION PASSING OUT OF THE CHURCHYARD AND PAST  
THE VILLAGE WAR MEMORIAL



VILLAGE GIRLS IN PROCESSION AFTER THEIR FIRST COMMUNION





and the temptations which come to a French university student at eighteen, and the physical hardship, discomfort, and knocking about, which a conscript is thrown on his own resources to endure at twenty-one, do not form part of the experience of most middle-class Englishmen until a later age, if they ever form part of it at all ; and the French boy has generally had no sort of training either to resist the temptations or to support the discomfort. He has to draw upon the instinctive resources of a character which is quite undeveloped.

As for the girl, her plunge into life is almost as sudden. No doubt the *jeune fille* is not as jealously protected as she used to be. No doubt she is no longer forbidden to read Victor Hugo until the day after her marriage, and is no longer forbidden to go out into the streets unless she is accompanied by a servant or by her mother ; but her freedom is still considerably restricted until she is married, whereas from that moment it suddenly becomes absolute and complete.

The spirit of secondary education in France is both severely intellectual and sincerely democratic, and it is in these two respects that it is most widely separated from the education of the upper and middle-classes in England. France has two great instruments of democracy—first, her education, in which every one, down to a very modest income, has an equal opportunity, while the same opportunity is also given to exceptional children of parents whose income is below that modest limit ; and, secondly, her army, in which every one, whatever his social position, must serve as a private soldier unless he is being trained to adopt the career of an officer.

Moreover, in France, almost the whole of education, secondary as well as primary, is not only controlled by, but directly organized by, the State.

All the important schools, technical as well as general, are State schools, and although there are private schools also, they are not very important. All the universities are State universities. So are the schools of law and medicine. So are the Conservatoire for musicians and singers and actors, and the Ecole des Beaux Arts for architects, painters, and sculptors. There are, indeed, private institutions which give a university education, such as the Instituts Catholiques of Paris and of Toulouse ; but none of these private schools, colleges, or institutions can give diplomas or confer degrees. Their pupils have to enter the public examinations conducted by the State.

The fees paid by the father of an *externe*, or home-boarder, in a *lycée* amount to about a thousand francs, or eight pounds a year, and the boys at a *lycée*, although on the whole belonging to the class which may be called *bourgeois*, are of far more widely differing social positions than could be found in any school in England. There are no doubt private schools which are more socially restricted, but not many, and the boys who are sent to them usually go because of their religious rather than their social distinctiveness. Certainly there is not the smallest social discredit attaching to the *lycée* education, which has been that of nearly all the distinguished men of France, and yet any one, be he baker or butcher or candlestick maker, can and does send his son there.

It would hardly occur to any French father to choose a school for his son for the reasons which, for an English father, undoubtedly govern the choice of Eton in very many cases. Indeed, there is no Eton in France, and no public school at all resembling Eton. If a French father would not choose a school for its social distinction, nor would he do so for its eminence in games—though football

is beginning to be played in French schools and is being taken quite seriously. He would never say that he did not much mind what the boy learnt out of his books, as long as his character was formed and he was taught to behave like a gentleman.

There is a similar difference between the Englishman's and the Frenchman's attitude towards the university. To most Englishmen Oxford or Cambridge is a sort of finishing school of games, good behaviour, and influential connexions. It used to be said that the real qualifications for a fellowship at All Souls' was to be *bene natus*, *bene vestitus*, *medie doctus*, and that when each candidate was asked to dinner, his table manners and his social self-control were tested by instructing the butler to whisper into his ear that the Warden would take a glass of wine with him just at the moment when he had his mouth full. Such stories would not be regarded as amusing at all in a French university. They would simply be incomprehensible.

The French do not distrust the intellect. On the contrary, they have a great respect for it, and what they expect the school to do is to develop the intellect, to give a liberal and not merely a practical education. The standard is high, and the *lycéen* is worked uncommonly hard. The *baccalauréat*, familiarly called the '*bachot*', the examination for which he enters when he is sixteen, would certainly floor most English public schoolboys, and that is not the end of the business, for after it the pupil has two more years of *rhétorique* and *philosophie*, unless he selects the more modern alternatives which have recently been introduced into the curriculum.

So much respect have the French for an intellectual education that they have instituted a special competitive examination, which is held simultaneously in all the *lycées* of France—as also is the '*bachot*'. It is called the *concours général*, and it

furnishes a *palmarès*, or honours list, headed by one boy who is first for the whole of France. The prize giving for the *concours général* is a solemn affair, held at the Sorbonne and attended by the President of the French Republic. Many well-known men have begun their careers by being one of the first half dozen in the *concours général*. Among them is M. Tardieu, to whom M. Poincaré, then a young Minister of Public Instruction, presented the first prize of the *concours général* a good many years ago, as he publicly recalled recently.

High as is the value which the French attach to learning, there is nevertheless something else about the education of the *bourgeois* class, without which it would not have its typically French character. It instils not only a literary culture but a high and very definite tradition of artistic taste. The French village carpenter—he would live on the outskirts of the market town rather than in a village—would probably laugh if he were told that he is an artist. He is one, all the same, and so is every other French workman engaged on making anything—the blacksmith, the mason, the plumber. His artistic taste may not go very far, and much of it may be atrocious, but he cannot approach any piece of work without considering that, whatever its utility, how it looks does have some importance.

That is about as far as artistic tradition goes with the village carpenter, who has had no artistic education. With the educated *bourgeois* it is quite a different matter. He has learnt to regard art as belonging to the national inheritance and the support of it as a civic duty. His Government is very niggardly in the spending of public money, and every public servant is underpaid. Yet heavy subsidies are given to two State theatres and two State opera-houses, and large sums go every year to preserving and keeping in repair ancient buildings—

many of them belonging to private owners—whose only claim on the public purse is that architects have declared that they are beautiful. Other sums are devoted to giving a free education in their art to musicians and actors whose talents are, in the same way, declared by experts to be worth training.

This recognition of the importance of the arts colours the whole of education. Every Thursday afternoon—Thursday is the school half-holiday—the Comédie-Française is crowded with boys and girls, who have been brought there by their parents, because the plays have been declared by authorities on the matter to be the best dramatic literature, and because the Comédie-Française is the recognized authority for the proper pronunciation of the French language. Consequently the classical performances at the Comédie-Française are a necessary part of any complete education. Included in such an education, though not quite so universally, will also be the poetry recital *matinées*, again at the Comédie-Française, which are always crowded, and occasional visits to the gallery of the Louvre, which the best critics have declared to be filled with the best pictures. It should be noted, moreover, that it is not only the exceptional parents of real artistic taste and training who take their children to these classical plays and these pictures. It is the prosaic and stolid *bourgeois*—and even the very small *bourgeois*—who does not pretend to any artistic taste himself, but was taken to see the same things when he was a boy, and knows that an elementary introduction to the arts is an indispensable part of a good general education.

It will be noticed from what I have said that authority plays a great part in all this. Little disposed as the Frenchman is to accept authority in political matters, and violently as he is inclined to resent its manifestations in regard to anything

connected with public order and discipline, the Frenchman, and particularly the French *bourgeois*, readily bows to authority in two departments—polite manners and art. In these two departments he is a far stricter worshipper of tradition than the English are in politics and social organization, though he likes to point to the English as the last survivors of the peoples to whom tradition was a faith. He forgets that what the Englishman worships is precedent, which is not the same thing.

In art, as in manners, the cultivated Frenchman's adherence to tradition is rigid. No Japanese, who will tell you that you must not find pleasure in a daisy, for it has long since been catalogued as one of the ugly flowers, is more severe in his conformity to an artistic convention than he. And in art, as in manners, the convention which he worships dates back to the end of the seventeenth century, to the time of the accomplished Court of the *Roi Soleil*, to the classic tragedy of Racine, the typically *bourgeois* comedy of Molière, the simple finality and completeness of the fables of Lafontaine, and the rich clarity of the prose of Boileau. To maintain and interpret those traditions the *Roi Soleil* himself founded academies, and academies exist to this day to act as the definite and supreme authority in deciding what the tradition shall be. The Institut, with its five academies—the Académie Française, the Académie des Inscriptions et Belles Lettres, the Académie des Sciences, the Académie des Beaux-Arts, and the Académie des Sciences Morales et Politiques—is among the few things in France which survived from the *ancien régime* and could only temporarily be suppressed by the Revolution; for the French, while they destroyed all other authority, required that the authority in taste and art and literature should continue. And it does continue. It enables France in all matters of art and literature

still to be sufficient unto herself and to regard the foreigner as the barbarian. It does not prevent her from making the most daring experiments and innovations in art ; for there is no country to-day where the ferment of constant art-adventure and art-creation is more active, where so many rebels are constantly breaking away. But the rebels know from what they are breaking away, and to what allegiance they can return ; and the standard and the authority remain, so that the *bourgeois* can always know where he is.



## CHAPTER XII

### SPORT AND *LE SPORT*

**A**T the beginning of July Paris packs up and goes away for the holidays, and is not in working order again until the middle of October. It must not be supposed that every business or professional man knocks off for as long as that. Nor must it be supposed that every one who goes away from Paris ceases on that account to work ; but if the husbands often have to stay in town except for three weeks in August, the wives and families are generally away for the three months. Moreover, social, artistic and literary Paris is dormant during the whole of that time.

This long summer holiday has become part of the regular life of France for three reasons. Firstly, at least a third, and in many ways the most prosperous and most lively part of the country, has a climate which makes hard work in the summer difficult and uncomfortable ; secondly, the school holidays, which naturally govern so much of social life, are all included in this one long stretch ; thirdly, nearly every one has a little country house of his own, to which his family can go without his having the anxiety of paying a long holiday rent as well as a permanent one. Indeed, in France, sending the family to the country in the summer is usually an economy rather than the reverse.

The second reason very particularly influences the life of Paris, and that not merely because the children are free. In Paris is by far the largest university in France, and Paris is the seat of what are by far her most important professional, artistic, and

scientific schools. The whole of Paris literary and artistic life therefore has certain direct academic connexions, and when the scholastic life is closed down much of the intellectual activity is closed down also.

This long summer holiday would not, however, have become a habit to a middle class so economical and so poorly paid as the French, if it were not that every one owns a tiny little property somewhere in the country. In the great majority of cases it can hardly be called a country house. It has no social pretensions, no material comforts, very little furniture, and no flower garden, though the vegetable garden on which the family lives during the summer is an important part of its value. It has probably been inherited, and the old grandparents may be living in it. It is probably in a remote village, far from any but peasant company.

It is here that, for three months of the year, the townsman's family, and the townsman himself for part of the time, will come and impregnate themselves once more with the peasant life, which is the base of their tradition. They will impregnate themselves with it far more than most English town families who spend a summer in the country; for they will have no social duties to perform, such as calls and tennis-parties, no social appearances to keep up, and above all, no social prejudices to prevent their frankly belonging once more, for the time, to the peasant life from which they sprang.

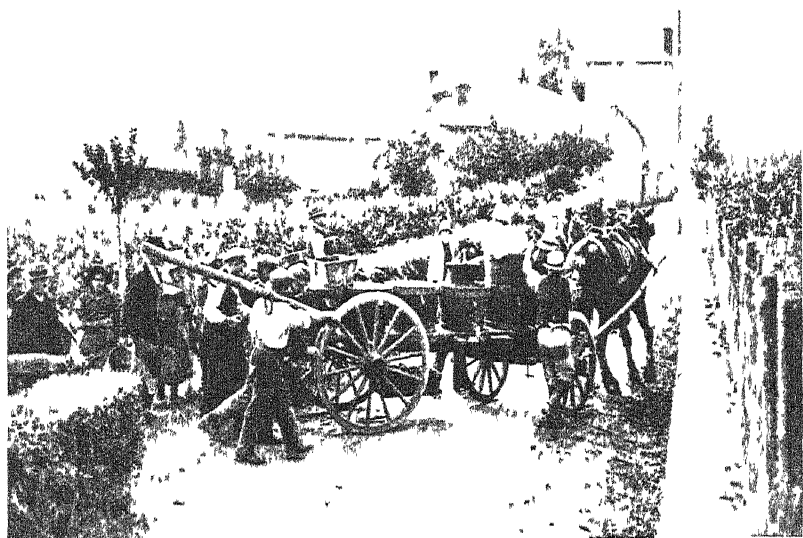
Moreover, it is not only the upper middle classes who come back in this way for several months in the year to the land. There are many little shops in Paris: cobblers, hairdressers, dyers and cleaners, haberdashers, florists, carpenters—all, indeed, except the purveyors of daily necessities—who are quite likely to put up their shutters in July, and to paste a notice on them with '*clôture annuelle, réouverture*

*en septembre* ' boldly written upon it, and then to go off to the little family cottage, where the grandparents are very likely bringing up the children.

Naturally there are also people who take their summer holidays in the mountains or by the sea, as there are in England; but in France they do not take them in quite the same way. The sea-side lodging-house, with a landlady who lets her sitting-room and two or three bedrooms to a family and 'does for' them, is unknown, as indeed are lodgings in town. In Paris you are either the tenant of a furnished or unfurnished flat, be it never so small, in which you make your own arrangements for cooking, or else you have a bedroom—never a sitting-room as well—in one of the hundreds of modest hotels which abound in Paris, and where, most probably, they will supply you only with your morning coffee—if that—and oblige you to go out to a restaurant for your meals. I am speaking, of course, of the most modest establishments, which, nevertheless, do not hesitate to call themselves hotels.

In a *ville d'eaux*, which may be at the sea-side or in the mountains, you either go to a hotel, which lodges you and feeds you, or you take a little furnished villa for the season and make your own domestic arrangements. There is nothing else.

Comfort and cleanliness in hotels vary in France, and not always in proportion to the approach to centres of civilization. Near the Spanish frontier you will be wise to be supplied with Keating's Powder, and you can still be shown into the sort of hotel bedroom where the sheets are declared to be clean, but look suspiciously crumpled, while all the vessels which should be full are empty, and all those which should be empty are full; but you can also find dirt and discomfort along the main motoring roads and sometimes even in hotels which have a long



TAKING THE GRAPES HOME FROM THE VINEYARD



A GAME OF "BOULES" IN A VILLAGE STREET IN THE SOUTH  
OF FRANCE



reputation and are now trading on it. On the other hand, some of the most modest hotels are admirably kept.

What does the Frenchman do to amuse himself in the country? The confusion in most Englishmen's minds as to the right answer to this question arises from the apparent contradiction between what is still believed to be the ingrained French disinclination from taking exercise and the undeniable fact that France can produce lawn tennis and golf international champions of both sexes and a victorious international football team.

Well, the contradiction is there. The French do dislike taking exercise. After having done his military service in an army which has long had a reputation for its marching powers, the Frenchman will look with wonder, not unmixed with contempt, at English men and women who put knapsacks on their backs and go walking for pleasure. For him muscular effort should be made only if there are reasons which make it necessary or an object to be achieved which cannot otherwise be attained. Grace of physical movement is worth while for its own sake, and the Frenchman therefore always has a sense of style in games. Physical movement for the mere pleasure of moving is, he thinks, never worth while. Apart from the object to be attained by it, physical movement can only in itself be of value as a test of the powers of endurance.

These general principles can be applied to explain the whole French attitude towards what in France is called *le sport*. Now, *le sport* in French does not mean sport either in the sense of hunting and shooting and fishing, nor in the sense of horse-racing. As for hunting and shooting and fishing—*la chasse* stands for the first two and *la pêche* for the third—they have been national recreations, and far more spread over all classes than in England, much too

long for it to be necessary to borrow an English word to describe them. As for horse-racing, it exists in the suburbs of Paris on Sunday afternoons, and thousands of people attend the meetings in order to gamble ; but it is virtually unknown elsewhere.

*Le sport* means athletic prowess. The form in which the working-class boy in a town most admires the display of this athletic prowess, and the form in which he always has some sort of ambition to excel himself, is long-distance bicycle-riding. In any Paris street you can see the butcher's *livreur* straining himself to keep his bicycle level with a motor-car, or delaying to deliver the meat and risking accident by riding his tricycle on two wheels. As for athletic champions, there is none whom the butcher boy – or, for the matter of that, any working man – admires so much as one of the pair who won the *Six Jours*, the indoor, relay, day and night continuous cycle race, in the winter, which is closely followed throughout by enthusiastic popular crowds in the galleries, or the *Tour de France*, the road race around the edge of France, in the summer, which is almost as closely followed on its course and in the papers.

The butcher boy has heard of the boxer, but takes comparatively little interest in him. He knows about football teams, and is quite ready to form part of the crowd which will cheer or hoot at a match, and not improbably attempt to lynch the referee, according as national or local patriotism is encouraged or defeated ; but he has no liking for, and little understanding of, the game itself, and certainly never plays it. As for lawn tennis and golf champions, he is no doubt vaguely glad to know that France possesses them, but has almost certainly no sort of notion of how either game is played.

If he lives in the southern half of France, the working man is pretty sure to be an enthusiast for

*les boules*—not the game of bowls, as it is, or was, played in England by elderly and prosperous tradesmen on closely-clipped bowling-greens, but a variant, which requires only an uneven piece of ground, of whose accidents the accomplished player can take advantage in any open square or even village street ; and he will probably also be a patron of the wooden skittle-alley, in which the game of *quilles* is played in the garden of his favourite café.

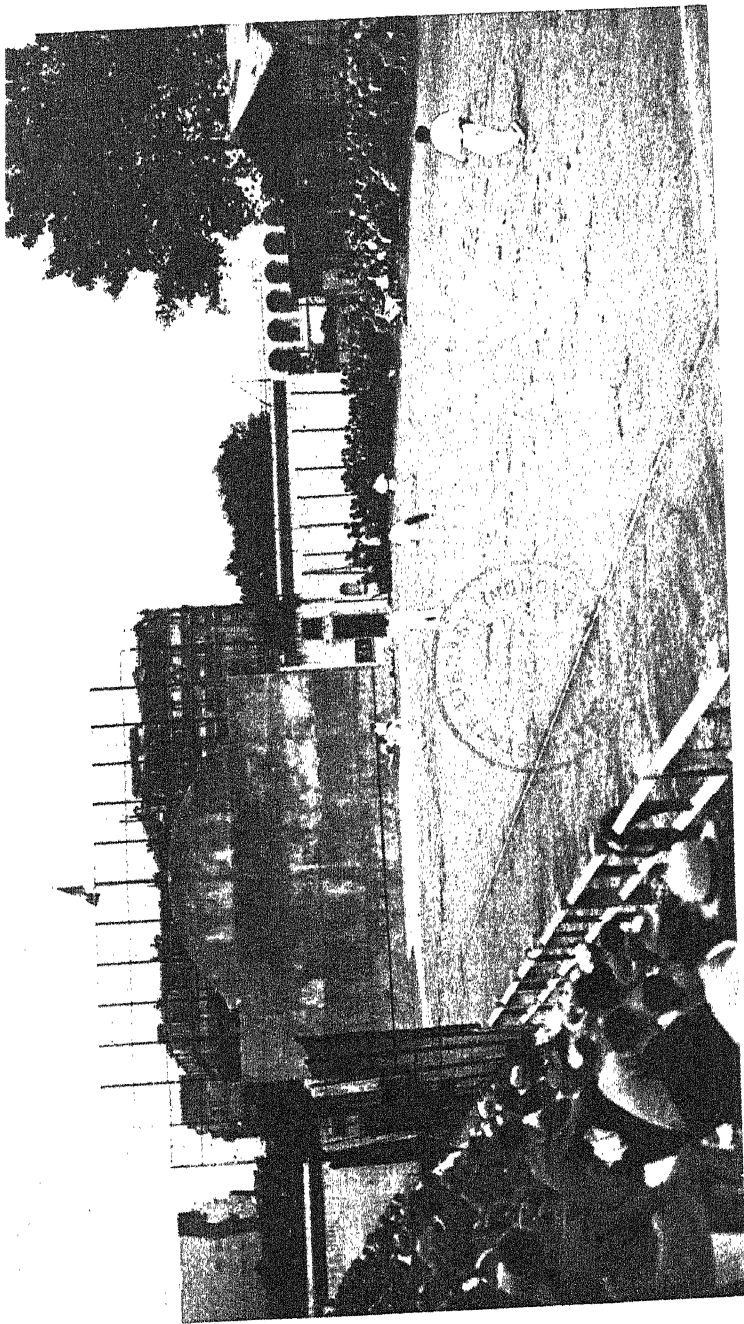
It is probably only if he belongs to the Basque country in the south-west of France that a Frenchman has any sense approximating to an Englishman's pleasure in a game, not merely for the skill required in playing it, not merely for the hazard which is incidental to it, not merely for the moral satisfaction and the kudos of winning it, not merely for the physical endurance of which he can show himself capable in sustaining it to the end, but for a combination of all four and, above all, for the bodily and mental relief which the playing of it gives and the happy and healthy repose after having played it. For the Basque is, in his lean and lithe appearance and in his movements, the one type in France of the athlete as most of us understand him. In every Basque town there is a *fronton*, a wall against which can be played *pelota*, that glorified game of fives, with a hooked basket racket, or *chistéra*, and sometimes at a distance of a hundred and fifty feet or more from the wall ; and in every Basque village every one, probably from the priest downward, plays *pelota*, with the *chistéra* or with the hand, against a special *fronton* or even against the wall of the church, and enjoys it, as in England the villagers can enjoy a game of cricket or of football.

In no French village outside of the Basque country are you likely to see any game being played, except it be the *jeu de boules*, and in no village in the northern half of France are you likely to see any game played



at all. I know that both sorts of football have been adopted by France, and that fierce local patriotism is aroused by *le rugby* in the Midi, where it has even ousted bull-fighting as a spectacular excitement, while the North has, much less enthusiastically, taken to *le football*, which is Association. But both of these games, when they are not played exclusively by gladiatorial experts for the passionate entertainment of crowds, are mainly confined, in the first place to towns and in the second to the *bourgeois* class. They are not games of the people, and are only played by a small proportion even of the *bourgeoisie*.

Boxing is still more exclusively gladiatorial and professional, on the one hand, and lawn tennis and golf still more exclusively middle class, on the other. Moreover, lawn tennis and golf, which are also exclusively middle-class in England, are played by an infinitely more limited section of the middle class in France, and it can hardly be said that they are often played for fun. They are either played casually and carelessly, because it happens to be the fashionable thing to play, or terribly earnestly and methodically by young men and women, who are either determined to become champions, or determined to win, or determined to cut a distinguished figure in playing, but do not give much evidence of taking pleasure in the game for its own sake. *Le sport* to them is, as I have said, a matter of physical prowess, of showing what you can do. When the French middle-class boy takes to rowing, which he calls *le canotage*, or cross-country running, which he calls *le cross*, one can notice the same rather set earnestness, the same lack of joy in the thing itself. No doubt what has been called the sporting spirit of the Englishman, which is after all no more than a sense that the whole thing is only a game, may interfere with complete devotion to the business of



THE BASQUE GAME OF PELOTA



winning and becoming a champion, but it enables him to get more amusement out of playing.

In England there is another motive for taking physical exercise which leaves the individual Frenchman quite cold, and that is bodily fitness. We often take exercise in order to feel fit, and the more gruelling the exercise the fitter we feel at the end of it—rather like the nigger who pricked himself all over with pins because it was so jolly when he stopped. I think the average Frenchman's reply would be that he feels fit without taking any exercise, and so excellent is his general physical constitution and so wholesome his food and most of his habits that I can really believe that he does feel fit.

However, if this consideration does not move the individual Frenchman, the official Frenchman takes it very seriously indeed. After being at first shocked at the callous frivolity of the English, who insisted on playing football behind the trenches, the French authorities soon took this relaxation very seriously as a practical contribution to the winning of the war. *Le sport* was taken up officially, not for its own sake, but quite definitely in order to make, first the army, and then the whole nation, from boyhood upwards, physically trained for the winning, not only of the actual but of any future wars.

This being not one of the objects of *le sport*, but its single object, it is not surprising that, officially considered, although it started with football, it soon came to include and then to consist almost exclusively of physical jerks. Football has been introduced into schools and into the army, but only as a sort of adjunct to gymnastic exercises. Credits have been voted for *terrains de sport* to be attached to schools, but the *terrain de sport* turns out to be more like an out-of-door gymnasium, with trapezes and parallel bars. Thirty millions of francs have been allotted to

the provision of a *terrain de jeux* in each village, but as the matter comes under the direction of the Under-Secretary for *Education Physique et Sports*, I am afraid the *jeux* to be played on these *terrains* will not consist very largely of amusing games.

The one form of violent exercise which the middle-class Frenchman used to take before the war was fencing; but he went to the *salle d'armes* because he knew that any day he might have to fight a duel. Duelling has now gone entirely out of fashion, but it is for similar reasons that official France is now encouraging *le sport*. It may have to fight a war, and *le sport* comes into the same category as the *associations de préparation militaire*, which encourage boys to get ready to become soldiers, and so to make better conscripts at the proper time.

Indeed, if it is a good thing that any nation should be physically fit, there is something to be said for compulsory military service as a means to this end; for not only does it induce the State to make all boys physically fit in order that they may become good soldiers, but, for thousands upon thousands of young men, the period during which they are soldiers is in itself most probably the only one in their lives during which they are really physically fit at all.

However, if that is an argument in favour of conscription, there are others against it; but they are not in question just now.

The State takes physical training very seriously, and *le sport* has had a considerable influence on the lives of the younger middle-class generation in the towns. That influence can easily be exaggerated, nevertheless, and it can hardly be said to touch real country life at all. Neither the townsman, who spends his holiday in the country, nor the peasant, who lives there, ever thinks of games or of any athletic exercise when it is a question of his

recreation ; he thinks of *la chasse* or *la pêche*, if he thinks of anything physically active at all.

*La chasse* in the sense of what our language conveys by the word 'hunting' may virtually be ruled out. The pursuit of the quarry on horse-back, which is usually that of the stag, and never of the fox, is, in France, if not exclusively the sport of kings, at least that of the old aristocracy, who still proudly ignore the Republic, and are rather pathetically picturesque though sometimes still wealthy survivors of the royalist period, whose hunting is a spectacular affair, with gold-laced scarlet coats and great brass hunting horns, looking to our own eyes as if they belonged to an orchestra. Indeed, horse-riding at all is rarer as a recreation than in England, and saddle horses, as well as horses for light road transport, are inexorably being replaced by motor-cars, although, curiously enough, the total number of horses in France is increasing, in consequence of motors having failed to oust them from farm-work and heavy traction.

The only hunting which is practised by the middle-class Frenchman is that of the wild boar, which still flourishes in the many forests of the country, and has flourished ever since the Gauls adopted a figure of him as their standard. For that hunting is usually carried out on foot, and the animal is killed with the spear or the hunting-knife, after having been brought to bay by the hounds.

Even the *chasse* of the wild boar is, however, often a matter of shooting rather than hunting, and *la chasse* in general would be understood by any Frenchman to mean the shooting of game, which nearly always means partridges and hares, but also includes rabbits.

One of the most persistent of British legends about the Frenchman is that he is an incompetent fisherman and a bad shot, who sets out with an enormous

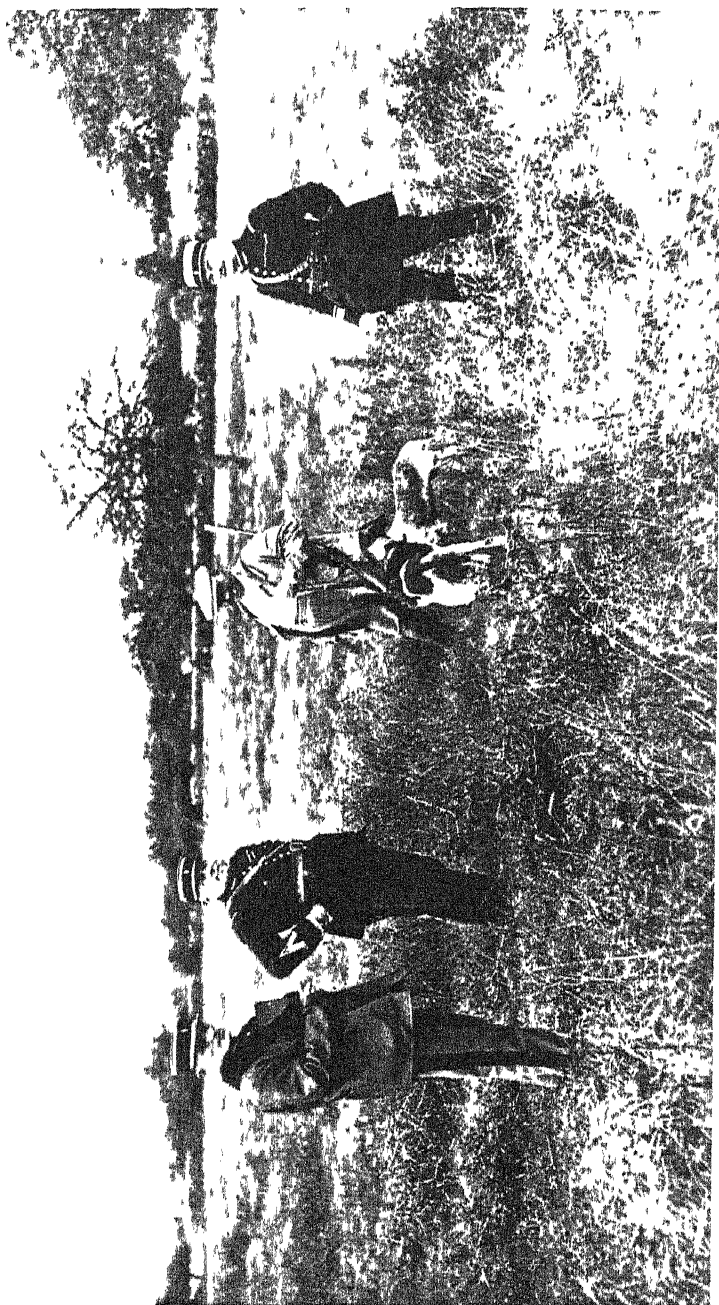
ornamental string bag and generally brings it back empty. 'Don't shoot,' says the French host in the story to his guest, who has levelled his gun at a hare. 'That is Alphonse. We never fire at Alphonse'; and, a little later, 'Blaze away now. That is Albert. We always have a shot at Albert.'

The truth is that there is probably a very much larger number of men in France who could bring down a hare or a partridge than there is in England; for in France shooting is a democratic sport. I do not say that a large number of those men would be above shooting a sitting bird, if they could get the chance, for they would think much more of filling the bag than of observing any etiquette of the sport; but they know how to hit the game, and they know how to find it. Moreover, as nearly all shooting in France is done over dogs, their breeding and training are understood to a degree which is less and less common in England, and the shooting itself requires a craft of wood and field which driven shooting does not demand.

In France shooting may be said to be the one form of out-of-door exercise which is practised by every one. Nearly every professional man living in a town goes out to the country to shoot on Sundays, and takes his dogs with him. Indeed, there are, during the season, special trains back to Paris on Sundays at the hours when *chasseurs* will be likely to be returning home, and special carriages on those trains reserved for them and their dogs, and so marked.

As for the peasant farmers who live in the villages, every one of them will go out shooting on Sundays, and every one of them will have his dogs.

If shooting is socially so widely-spread a pastime, it is because preserving on a large scale is far rarer than in England. Of course, there are rich men who have big shoots, as there are men who breed



GENDARMS SETTING WHETHER A SPORTSMAN HAS HIS SHOOTING LICENSE





pheasants and organize drives ; but they are the exception rather than the rule. The small farmer in the village is either the owner of the land which he farms, and therefore of the shooting rights upon it, or, on the rare occasions on which he is a tenant—which would generally be on the *métayer* system of paying his rent in the form of a share of the crops rather than in money—would nearly always have the shooting rights included in his tenancy.

Moreover, the small farmer hardly ever keeps to himself the shooting rights over the land which he owns. It would generally in practice be difficult to do so, because in most cases his land is scattered, like postage stamps, over the area, or *territoire*, of the *commune*. Occasionally he does keep his shooting rights, and you will see a little board in a narrow field with '*chasse gardée*' painted upon it. More usually he pools them with those of the other landowners of the *commune*, and they form a *Société de Saint Hubert*—patron saint of the chase—to which town-dwelling strangers are sometimes admitted on payment of a subscription in lieu of contributing any land, and the *société*, thus financially fortified, will perhaps engage a *garde chasse* to protect its shooting from being invaded either by professional poachers, of which there are many, or by casual visitors, who rely upon being unmolested. It need hardly be added that, under these conditions, the first days of the season are the only ones in which game in any quantities is shot, and even then the quantities are not great. Soon afterwards the birds are so wild that it is virtually impossible to approach them.

In the mountainous parts of France there are the chamois of the Alps and the izards—which are much the same—of the Pyrenees. In the latter mountains there are still said to be bears, though few people have seen them. In certain forests there are also supposed to be a few surviving wolves ; but

these are to all practical purposes extinct, although the *Lieutenants de Loucheurie* are not yet abolished, and the office continues to be held and the picturesque uniform worn by aristocratic persons. In the marshes there are wild duck and other fowl, and in moorland country - which is not common in France - there are capercaillie. For most Frenchmen, however, *la chasse* does not extend to such fancy game.

*La pêche*, which means watching a float from a river bank or a moored boat, is the classic summer pastime of comfortable and middle-aged men of all classes, from prime ministers M. Briand is a devoted fisherman to small shopkeepers. All along the many rivers of France in the warm weather you will see boats tied to tall sticks which quiver in the stream, and in those boats stout old men in their shirt-sleeves and with wide-brimmed straw hats, waiting for a bite, while their wives are probably knitting under a convenient tree on the bank. All along the edges of these rivers, and especially on the quays and the bridges in the towns, are other fishermen, rather less comfortable-looking, but still middle-aged, who are waiting to hook the fish richly fed on the city garbage. Both in country and town the sight is an excellent object-lesson for those who have imagined that the French are not a patient people. It should be said, by the way, that since the war, when the art was learnt by French officers from British, there is an increasing though still small number of French fly fishermen.

Such are the recreations in the country of those who imagine that the proper way to enjoy leisure is to occupy it by doing something. By far the greater number of Frenchmen seek no such occupation. To them the ideal way of passing a workless day in the country is to have a good lunch and then spend the rest of the afternoon sitting round a table under a

tree in the garden and talking, just as the ideal way of passing a workless hour in town is to sit round a table in, or in front of, a café and talk also. For talk is really the national recreation of the Frenchman, as love-making is, in spite of the recently invented *sportifs*, the national sport.

## CHAPTER XIII

### THE DEFENCE OF PROPERTY

THERE are lies, damned lies, and statistics, and the Frenchman loves statistics. He even has a special Government office for them. It is called the 'Bureau de la Statistique de France', and there the statistics are classified, sub-classified, and re-classified, and then placed at the disposal of any student who happens to have discovered where the office is.

It must not be taken that if the Frenchman loves statistics he is always in consequence a liar, though it may perhaps be said of him that, as of the Irishman in the story, he has far too much respect for the truth than to use it on every small occasion. He does not, in fact, furnish a conspicuous national exception to the affirmation of the preacher that all men are liars. He does sometimes consider himself bound, and very seriously bound, to respect the truth, but that is only when it is written down. He is very fond of saying, '*Je n'ai qu'une parole*', but you must not believe him. He has many *paroles*, most of them designed to express as gracefully as possible what he thinks you would like to hear. He does not, however, consider himself to be committed by any one of them, unless he has consented to take the solemn step of putting it into writing. Once he has done that, he is held. He has made a contract, and the exact observance of a contract is, in French eyes, a sacred thing. Once signed, every word of it is intangible. That is why, to the French, a treaty is much more inviolable than a law. A law can be altered, but a treaty is a contract. Is it not, indeed,

part of the Constitution of the French Republic that no law can alter an *acte notarié*, an agreement made *par devant notaire*, through the agency of a public notary?

Now, when I say that to a Frenchman the observance of a contract is sacred, I mean that the party who benefits by the observance has a sacred right to enforce that observance. It has been said that the Englishman asks himself what are his duties and the Frenchman what are his rights, and although that is too vague a generalization, it is true that the Frenchman's habit is to enforce his rights under any written agreement, without any qualms of conscience and without very much pity, but to wait before performing his obligations until the other party takes steps to enforce them. The Frenchman, for instance, nearly always pays his debts; but he hardly ever pays them until his creditor has taken the trouble to call for the money.

It is not easy to get a Frenchman to put pen to paper; but that is because he knows that he is going to be held to his bond if he does. Once the bond exists it is a sheet-anchor for the beneficiary of it. In all negotiations, public and private, the Frenchman will always be harking back to what the Englishman would call documents and he calls texts. The right, in all armies, of the subordinate to insist on having his orders in writing is in complete conformity with the French temperament, and the joke that the war would come to an end, not because there were no more soldiers but because there was no more paper, was nowhere so well appreciated as in France. The elaborate and laborious *papérasserie* of French officialdom is all an expression of the same spirit. So is the Frenchman's love of dates—not of the year, but of the month. He will talk of the Government of the third of November, the elections of the eleventh of April, and will even name a street to commemorate the fourth of September.

In the same spirit, too, is the Frenchman's attitude towards the laws of his country. By nature he is rebellious to authority, and he cares not at all for order. As with a contract, he sees no reason why he should observe a law until somebody comes along to make him observe it; but when that happens he conforms at once. What gives him a sense of security as a citizen is that the laws have been passed and that they are on paper and exist, properly classified. It even gives him some satisfaction to notice that they are being constantly increased. It worries him very little to know that most of them are not enforced. They are there, and can be enforced if necessary. That is the main point.

In the affairs of his daily life, not only the townsman but the peasant is surrounded by a comfortable wall of protective documents. At the *mairie* of his village is the *cadastre*, or official map of the commune, on which every plot of land is marked and numbered, as well as every boundary stone, so that disputed questions can always be settled. In his own house he has all sorts of documents. There is his own marriage contract with his wife, providing for the disposal of his and her contribution to the common property in the event of the demise of either of them or any of their relatives or progeny. There are the contracts under which he has bought or exchanged all sorts of odd pieces of land. If he has purchased a business with its stock in trade, there will be the contract under which he will pay for it by a series of *traites*, or bills, spread over several years. Copies of most of these agreements will also be filed with the *bureau de l'enregistrement* of the district, so that reference can be made to them in case either of the parties loses his own copy--which, in the case of a French peasant, seems a quite superfluous precaution.

There are other documents which every Frenchman

carries upon his person. He must be able to prove his identity at any moment, and as properly witnessed and officially certified documents cannot lie—at least they cannot in France—his pocket-book contains the necessary documents to make the proof. These will consist of his *carte d'électeur*, which entitles him to give his parliamentary vote, and his *livret militaire*, which shows his army record during his term of compulsory service.

The contract being in itself such a solemn thing it follows that the *notaire*, who draws it up, is an impressive and important person. He is one of the most characteristic figures in the life of a French provincial town, and the ritual of signing an agreement in his *étude*—which is the special word for a *notaire's* office—is surrounded by a ceremony, which must date directly from the time of Molière. He performs part of the duties which in England would fall to a solicitor, the part which is concerned with litigation being carried out by the *avoué*. He is probably a busier man than an English country solicitor, however, for there are far more small landowners who call upon his services.

He is a public official, as is also the auctioneer, or *commissaire priseur*, of the town, and as are the *huissiers*—bailiffs, who are themselves entitled to hold auction sales and draw up certain agreements, and especially to give sworn reports as to certain facts and to issue and serve summonses. Each of these officials puts up over his door the small oval sign of cheap yellow metal, with a sitting figure of the Republic, which can be seen on a number of houses in any little French town. The style of the sign itself is as reminiscent of the period of the *bourgeois* king, Louis-Philippe, as are the *notaire* himself and his office. So important is that office considered to be [that every *notaire* is appointed directly by the President of the Republic, and has



to give considerable financial as well as other guarantees.

When, after considerable waiting in their Sunday best in the outer office, the parties to an agreement are eventually ushered into the *notaire's* private room, they will find two monumental arm-chairs conveniently placed near the *notaire's* table, and other chairs disposed in semi-circle to right and left of them. In one of the arm-chairs the important personage of each side is invited to sit, and, the rest of the party having settled down on the remaining chairs, the *notaire* proceeds to read the agreement. Every one listens, and pretends to look as if he understood, and then every one signs, and, after shaking hands with the *notaire*, files out. The company afterwards assembles at the nearest café and, in a manner only slightly less solemn than that assumed before the *notaire*, celebrates the occasion in the manner sanctified by tradition in all countries. It may be noted, as indicating the responsible and official position which the *notaire* holds, that it often happens that only a single copy of the contract is signed by all the parties. In several weeks' time they will receive from him copies which are signed by him, and a similar copy will be filed at the *enregistrement*. It is he who certifies that these copies reproduce the original, signed in his office, and this original he keeps.

Even more quaintly old-fashioned than the signing of an agreement is the sale of a property '*aux feux*'. This is a sale of real property by an auction, held in his *étude* by a *notaire* or an *avoué*, who lights three little tapers in front of him. As long as one of the tapers is still burning bidding can continue. When the last goes out it is closed.

The sacredness of property inspires the solemnity of everything connected with its transfer. The French peasant lives for his property, lives to

increase his property, and he lives to hand on his property to his heirs. Except on the one occasion when he marries his son or his daughter, he has no desire to show his wealth, and he even prefers—by his clothes, by his house, by his garden, and by his manner of living—to conceal the fact that he is rich. For if he can do that he will succeed in paying less taxes, and he hates paying taxes, not only because he hates any parting with money, but because he has no belief that the State can do him any good, or even any harm. It is the hatred of having to make a declaration of income, which is at the bottom of the bitter French resentment at the income-tax. Nobody, indeed, does make a true declaration, except the official and the salaried worker, who cannot help it, and, to judge by the income-tax returns, all of the French peasant proprietors must be starving. Such taxes as he does pay, however, the peasant insists on paying in person and not by post. Such an important sacrifice must be made with due solemnity.

For all the passion of property and its acquisition, the vast majority of owners of land in the country and houses in the towns are, nevertheless, small owners. The Revolution established small properties, and hardly anywhere have they become fused into large properties ever since. The inheritance laws, which oblige parents to leave their property to be equally divided among their children and make it impossible to disinherit any one of them, tend further to subdivision, or would do so if their action were not in part frustrated by the deliberate limitation of many property-owning families to one child. This limitation, however, leads, for another reason, to properties remaining small; for as most peasant owners dislike employing labour outside of their own families, farms rarely become larger than a man and his wife and his son and his wife can work.

Whatever the cause, there is no doubt that property in France continues to be spread over a large number of persons. This is true of urban as it is of rural property. Many of the people who live in flats in Paris pay their rents to a *propriétaire*, who himself collects them and himself lives on a floor of the house. There are few large landlords and no ground landlords, for the owner of a house almost always owns the land on which it is built. Small ownership is equally in evidence in the suburbs. No rows of semi-detached villas, exactly alike and run up by a speculative builder; every little house is defiantly individual, and has probably been built out of the savings of a man who has put something aside out of his salary for years, in order, towards the end of his life, to satisfy his passion for owning the place he lives in. The general effect of such a suburb is incongruous, especially as French architecture is at its very worst in the suburban manner, more especially still when it is pretentious, and most especially of all when it adopts the style known (alas!) as the *cottage anglais*. Nevertheless, incongruous as it is, there is something agreeably and sturdily combative about it, in spite of its ugliness.

The prevalence of small ownership in the country is shown by the fact that there are 2,000,000 people owning and farming less than  $2\frac{1}{2}$  acres each, and another 2,500,000 owning and farming less than 25 acres each. There are only 140,000 people who farm more than 100 acres each. As for property in general, the death duties paid in 1926 show that out of 400,000 who died, only 30 left more than £80,000 and only 3 of these more than £400,000; 119,000 left under £16; 138,000 between £16 and £80; 110,000 between £80 and £400; 20,000 between £400 and £800; 11,000 between £800 and £2,000; 3,500 between £2,000 and £4,000; 1,500 between £4,000 and £8,000; 715 between £8,000 and £16,000; 305

between £16,000 and £40,000; and 85 between £40,000 and £80,000.

As the French peasant is fierce in the acquisition of property, he is fierce in the defence of it. There may be no hedges, but boundaries are rigidly guarded, and the ploughshare which goes beyond them by half an inch will probably involve the man who drives it in a lawsuit. This does not prevent the ploughshare being driven to within a quarter of an inch of the boundary.

Like peasants everywhere, the French countryman is horribly litigious, though fortunately most of his legal adventures go no farther than the *Juge de Paix*. That official—for though his salary is very modest, he is salaried—has jurisdiction over a canton or group of about ten communes. He can impose small fines, and can inflict sentences of a few days' imprisonment; but his chief business is the hearing of actions which peasants bring against each other—accusations of *diffamation*, or the using of angry and offensive language, claims for damages over breaches of contract, boundary disputes, depredations caused by cattle, and so forth, as well as such claims for debt as would be heard in England by a county court judge. In every one of such cases the first stage, before hearing the arguments of the parties and giving judgement, in what is called *conciliation*, bringing the parties together and trying to make them come to an amicable agreement. If this fails, the next stage is then postponed to another day, but it very often happens that it does not fail. Divorce cases are the only others in which this *conciliation* stage is used in French actions at law.

Sales at auction are in two ways characteristic of France. They are always crowded—far more so than most auction sales in England—for they minister to that gambling spirit which makes the Frenchman, in spite of his amazing thrift, always

ready for a lottery, on condition that the stakes are modest and the possible—if only remotely possible—gains are large. They are also typical of France because they illustrate the way in which the inheritance laws work. Many things are sold by the children of a father or mother who is just dead, not because they want to get rid of the property, but because they cannot agree as to the valuation of it in the equal division which the law requires. So they divide the money.

In Paris auction sales have their own character. At the Hôtel Drouot a sale of works of art attracting collectors from all over Europe may be going on in one room, while downstairs, if not actually next door, another auctioneer, who has hired his room for the day, may be disposing of the few bits of furniture of some poor wretch who has not been able to pay his rent, and a number of rag-and-bone men may be bidding against one another for a feather quilt. Both the art sale and that of the furniture will be full of people, very few of whom intend to buy, but who are part of that crowd of idlers always available in Paris, while a touch of the picturesque will be given by the powerful Hôtel Drouot porters, wearing soft caps dropping down over their ears, as if they were pirates in a comic opera.

In the country the sales will be just as crowded, but with a very different sort of public. They take place on Sunday afternoons, and in the open air. They are the social event of the village. Everybody turns out, and most of the peasants bring their families, who play in the grass while the mothers bid against each other, *son* by *son* and very slowly, for three burnt-out enamel saucepans from the kitchen or a dozen dusty glass jampots fetched up from the cellar, where they have probably lain for years.

The auctioneer stands in the cottage doorway, behind, or sometimes upon, a table which has been

placed across the opening for the often very heterogeneous lots to be spread out upon it, and also to serve as a barrier to prevent the very closely packed little crowd from entering the house. In front of the table, at an early hour, the keenest of the women from this and the adjoining villages have established themselves on chairs, which will afterwards be sold. Behind them stand the rest of the village, each man or woman determined, whether he intends to buy or not, that he will not yield an inch of the position of vantage which he has acquired.

The auctioneer is, of course, a humorist, and his sallies are certain of applause, not least if they are concerned with articles of domestic furniture which lend themselves to a not very refined hilarity. He shouts all the time. If he stops for a moment his assistant takes up the shouting. Sometimes they both shout at once.

Behind him, in the shadow of the doorway, will be seen one of the heirs, taking precise note of everything sold and its price, in case of any dishonesty—or, shall we say, mistake—for you can never be too careful, though the auctioneer is well known in the district. Two other heirs will probably be discovered farther back, bringing out the lots which are to be sold, and passing them to the auctioneer's foreman at the table.

Nobody is in a hurry. The sale begins with odd pieces of crockery, rusty tools, all the rubbish of a farm yard and a farm kitchen, which will be sold separately at prices so small that the commission of the auctioneer and his assistant must be an uncommonly low figure for half an hour's persuasive lung power. '*C'est bien vu, bien entendu ? Il n'y a pas de regrets ? Une fois, deux fois. J'adjuge . . . Adjugé. Trois francs. Madame Gautier, de La Mare sous Venables.*'

Even at these modest prices the village housewives

have probably paid more than the things were worth. Keen as they are about values on a market day, they cannot help being carried away by the excitement at a sale, and they may give a franc and a half for something, which even when it was new, was only worth a franc. They can afford it, however, though a franc is always a franc, if it may be no more than twopence.

Besides, these village sales are to some extent social battle-grounds. *La mère* Baret will go up to three francs fifty, not only in order to prevent *la mère* Lequeu from getting the *casserole* with a broken handle, but to show every one also that she can afford three francs fifty, while *la mère* Lequeu cannot, just as *le père* Morteau will buy that cider press which *le père* Rigot has come to the sale on purpose to secure, not because he wants it himself, but to annoy *le père* Rigot and prevent his getting it.

When the sale has passed beyond the kitchen utensils and reaches the furniture it assumes a slightly different character. Everything is, of course, known and recognized. That is the arm-chair in which the old man used to sit by the fire. That is the clock which stood by the fireplace. Some things have been marked down for years by neighbours who have always meant to buy them when the time came. The appearance of others arouses adverse comment. 'One would not have thought that they' — 'they' are the heirs—' would have allowed the *couronne de la mariée* of the old lady, under its glass shade, to go into the sale.' 'What can you expect, *ma chère*?' They had never been to see their parents for years. They were only waiting for the *héritage*.'

When the beds and the big oak *armoire* in the kitchen and other things, which can with difficulty be moved, are reached, the table across the door is taken away, and the auctioneer, accompanied by the

now diminished crowd, pushes his way into the tile-floored kitchen or up the tiny staircase. The purchasers of pots and pans are collecting their spoil, which they had stacked in little heaps around the farmyard, and are making off. Only the serious buyers remain. They include two hitherto silent dealers from Rouen, who cause a sensation by bidding against each other up to seven hundred francs for that little chest of drawers which every one thought was worth only sixty, and are afterwards assailed by peasants, who are at once ready to sell as *antiquités*, and at fabulous prices, pieces of furniture which they had hitherto only considered as old and rather shaky.



## CHAPTER XIV

### EATING AND DRINKING

IN England it has long been regarded as neither manly in a man nor womanly in a woman to take an interest in food. For a man it would be luxurious to concern himself with such finicking and effeminate things as the delicate flavour of a salad or with such sensual gluttony as the frank enjoyment of a well-cooked meal. Food to him should be regarded merely as fuel with which to stoke his vigorous energy, and not either as a bodily pleasure or an artistic distraction, the first of which is morally to be suspected and the second mentally to be despised. He must be fed. 'Feed the brute' is the classic advice to a young married woman, but the mere choice of the words shows that it is considered to be sufficient to throw the ravenous animal large lumps of a nourishment which may be supposed to consist principally of raw meat.

A woman, on the other hand is much too ethereal and romantic a creature to move in a world of such coarse appetites as those of the table, or to occupy herself more than is absolutely necessary with such unattractive tasks as those of the kitchen. The pure flame of her energy needs no stoking, or at least she must hardly confess that it does, and she must do as little as possible of that stoking in public; while art is an affair of such refined and abstract beauty that it cannot be conceived that so material a pursuit as cooking can belong to its world.

Moreover, food is not only unmanly and un-womanly, but ungentlemanly and unladylike. Well-bred persons eat what is put before them, without

either praising it, criticizing it, or even betraying any enjoyment of it. To discuss it in any way is indeed vulgar, and to show indifference to its subtleties is alone genteel. The one thing that a lady or a gentleman should think about during a meal is table manners. The correct and refined use of the fork is a much more important preoccupation than the flavour of the food, and it would be in fact hardly credible to a nicely-brought-up English man or woman that peas could have any pleasant taste if they were conveyed to the mouth upon a knife.

No doubt there are Englishmen who heartily enjoy a good meal, and many Englishwomen devote a certain amount of care and attention to securing that the food which they present shall at least look appetizing and shall above all be wholesome. It is true that the best English food is as good as anything in the world. There is nothing more delicious than a prime English roast joint of beef or mutton, than a plain English boiled turbot or grilled sole, than an English covered cherry tart, than an English Stilton or Cheddar cheese. The trouble is that the Englishman so rarely gets any of these good things. He so rarely gets them, partly because he so rarely insists upon getting them, and partly because he has almost lost the faculty of knowing the good things from the bad. There are few Englishmen left to-day on whom New Zealand frozen mutton cannot safely be foisted for Southdown, a degenerate plaice for a sole, bottled cherries for fresh, margarine for butter, and American imported cheese for British, not only without his protesting, but without his ever having noticed the difference. Even the palate for wine, which Englishmen once had, has almost disappeared. It has been drowned out by whisky and soda, burnt out by cigarettes or poisoned out by cocktails.

Another reason why good English food is rare in England is that the good English dishes are all

expensive. Roast and grilled meats must be the best cuts, even when the best is not always of first-rate quality. The result is that in most English families the Sunday dinner is the only one of the week which can decently be set up in comparison with the carefully chosen and carefully cooked repast which a French family has every day.

If the Englishman takes less interest than the Frenchman in what he eats for his daily meal, the Englishwoman certainly takes far less interest than the Frenchwoman in the purchasing and preparation of it, and spends less time and trouble on both. Perhaps she spends less money also, but of this I am not sure ; for although food and the labour and the utensils employed in cooking it are responsible for a larger proportion of a French family budget than of an English, the Frenchwoman buys so cleverly and economically, and wastes so little, that she can get a far higher value for what she spends. Moreover, she is concerned more with the taste of the resulting dishes than with their appearance, and she consequently gives no time or money to preparing decorative but unpalatable little dishes of hors d'œuvres or elaborately built-up and complicated puddings. Indeed, the English pudding, which can sometimes be an admirable thing in itself, is unknown in France.

As for dietetic values and vitamins, the Frenchwoman fortunately takes no interest in them at all. She follows very definite and ancient traditions as to what is wholesome in food and the cooking of it. She makes a great feature of vegetables and of *compotes* of stewed fruit, as well as of fruit in the raw, and the word 'dessert' includes *compotes*, as well as raw fruit, as, indeed, it may even be made to include the *entremet*, which is the sweet dish or pastry, and even the cheese. She never fails to follow the fats of a meat dish with the corrective vinegar of a salad. She and the whole of her family eat largely of bread.

Her tradition has taught her not in fact to neglect the wholesome qualities of the lactic acids in the numerous varieties of French cheese, many of which varieties are cream cheeses ; but she never mentions such unattractively scientific words, and has perhaps never heard them. She certainly worries not at all about buying boxes of the most recently advertised health food, and she much prefers bread made from home-grown wheat to patent 'cereals' with pretentious labels on the packets. She is perhaps hardly conscious of any dietetic considerations in the doing of her marketing, and buys things rather because she and her family would like to eat them than because they are wholesome. Indeed, if she avoids the cooked food in tins, on which so many English housewives fall back because they are lazy or because they are as incapable of resource as they are of sauces, the reason is probably rather that she knows the food will be nasty and will taste of the tin than that it is liable to be poisonous. The Frenchwoman, in fact, understands that it is as important that food shall be pleasant to eat as that it shall be nourishing and innocuous. Moreover, she is as frankly interested in its taste and its nourishment herself as she is careful of securing them for the family for whom she caters. However poetical or distinguished or refined she may be, she never pretends to be indifferent to the table. Even at the height of the Romantic period, when it was fashionable to look cadaverous and if possible to be dying of consumption, neither the tragic young men nor the lovesick young women ever forgot *l'heure du déjeuner*.

All over France that is the hour upon which the whole business of the day centres. Dinner may be more important for ceremony, but the time when the *bourgeois* as well as the working-class family eats is the *déjeuner*. For many of them, indeed, it is the one time when they do really eat ; for not only does

the traditional French breakfast consist of no more than a cup of *café au lait* with a slice of bread and butter, not infrequently dipped in the coffee—which the luxurious sometimes exchange for chocolate - but there are many quite well-to-do homes where meat is never served for dinner unless there is company.

*Déjeuner*, on the other hand, is always a full meal. The 'three-hour-for-lunch club' is a joke in London, but it has long been a reality in Paris - or at least two of the three hours are real, and indeed almost universal. Although the tradition has been slightly shaken by the invasion of English and American habits, all Government offices and most others close down entirely between twelve and two, and so do many shops. Nearly every one goes home - even those who have to make a train journey into the suburbs to do so ; for convinced as many Englishmen are that the French eat most of their meals in restaurants, or even in cafés - which, in fact, are places only for drink - the truth is that the Frenchman always prefers to go home if he can, because he knows that the food will not only be cheaper but better in itself and more carefully and more cleanly cooked. The clerk and often the shop girl usually go home, as well as the man of business. Only the workman does not, because the workman only gets a luncheon interval of one hour instead of two.

Eating in France is, in fact, a serious matter, which must be taken seriously.

I remember being told by an English friend who had been on a visit to a large French country house that she had been surprised to find that no servant answered the bell in her bedroom. Upon subsequent investigation she found that there was only one housemaid for a large establishment, but that, on the other hand, there were a chef and four assistants in the kitchen. The distribution very fairly represents

the French estimate of the relative importance of comfort and food. In France less is expected of servants in the way of fetching and carrying and answering bells than in England. Less money is spent on rent, on furniture and on attendance, whether the object be personal ease or merely the keeping up of appearances. On the other hand, more time and thought and money and labour are devoted to the selection and preparation of food. Nearly every Frenchman has some idea of cookery himself—as one could see in the French trenches—and certainly every Frenchman takes an interest in food. He gets good cooking because he will not accept bad cooking, and his cooks know that their good work is appreciated. There are good French cooks in London restaurants ; but after a time most of them cook badly, as do the cooks in Paris restaurants frequented by Englishmen, because no customer ever praises a dish when it is good or sends it back when it is bad. The cooks learn that Englishmen will eat anything.

As for women in France, to every one of them cooking is a duty passionately and devotedly performed. She is religious about her kitchen, even when she is about nothing else. To most Frenchwomen cooking is also a delight, rapturously enjoyed. Moreover, the French housewife is not only a good but an economical cook. Though she spends money, she never spends it wastefully ; and she certainly never throws away any food which can be used up at a subsequent meal. *L'art d'accomoder les restes* is one of the most ingeniously practised of the arts in France. Much of what is left over from lunch goes into the soup at night, and what is left over from dinner appears as a hors d'œuvre at the lunch of the following day.

First of all, the Frenchwoman knows how to buy. There is no waiting for the tradesmen to call for

orders—which they would not do in any case—no accepting such goods as they may elect to send. Though a certain amount of food in Paris is ordered by telephone and delivered, by far the greater part is carefully chosen by the buyer and taken away. There is hardly a Frenchwoman who thinks herself above going to market with her cook—or even alone—and bringing back her purchases in a string bag. She notes variations in quality and price from day to day, and changes her sources of supply accordingly, for she always buys for cash. A glance at the shops where food is sold will furnish indications of the care with which it is bought. No butcher is allowed by law to sell frozen meat in the same department of his shop as fresh meat, and in practice the same tradesman does not deal in both. No Frenchman who can afford fresh meat will eat the ‘ frigo ’, which can be found on most private tables and in every restaurant in London, and he knows the taste well enough not to be deceived. As for the horse-flesh, which is supposed by many people in England to be the usual substitute for beef in France, that, too, is sold in different shops, and is only eaten by the very poor. Moreover, as French butchers sell all parts of beef or mutton in much smaller quantities, the French housewife can buy her meat without the inevitable waste of large joints. For butter and cheese and eggs she goes to her dairyman. She would detect a taste of soap and candles if she bought them at her grocer’s. At every dairyman’s you will find several qualities of butter and of eggs—without descending to the political sort—and many kinds of cheese, soft and hard. And to the modest housekeeper, with limited facilities for cooking, there are the infinite resources of the *charcuterie*, where not only hams and galantines but freshly cooked vegetables and other foods of many kinds can be bought in small quantities.

A French officer who was attached to a British mess once described the soup to me as 'pepper and hot water', and when he went round the trenches and inspected the decoction of tannic acid which the troops kept permanently on the brew, he said it was a pity the English made tea as strong as good coffee and coffee as weak as good tea. I can recall a French family who arrived in London and were served with a vegetable which was partly floating in some of the water in which it had been plainly boiled. The dish was passed round with great interest as a curiosity—it consisted, ironically enough, of French beans—but nobody was brave enough to eat any, so unthinkable was it that vegetables should be served otherwise than with the water carefully drained off and a little melted butter added to them. The typical Englishman is inclined to regard such French refinements in cooking as 'greasy' and unwholesome. The typical Englishwoman would undoubtedly not have the patience to pursue through their appropriate stages the processes of cooking which Frenchwomen regard as part of the normal day's work—and by far the most interesting part of it. The interest which she takes in it is really the secret of the whole matter. The French make an art of feeding. They learn to recognize the delicate refinements of the palate. They know what is good, and they care enough to see that they get it. The Englishman does not get it because he does not know, and he has never learnt to know because he does not really care.

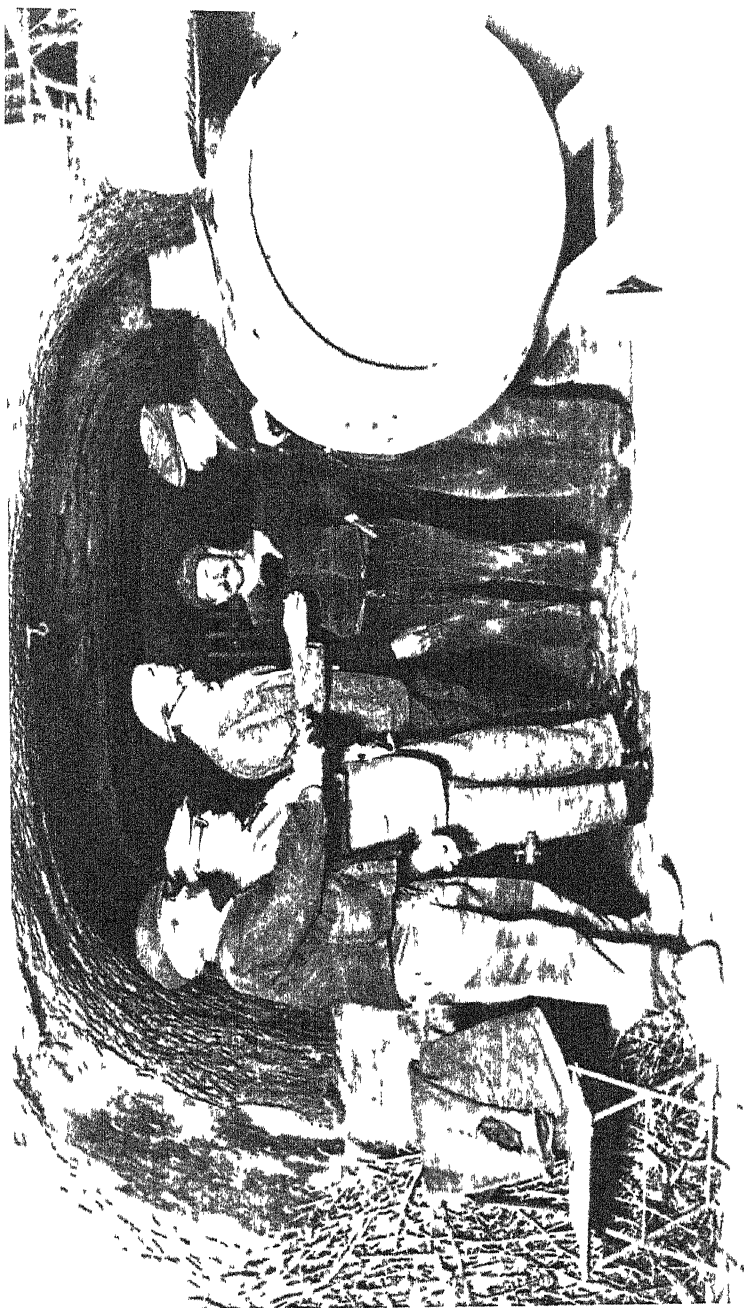
It would be a mistake, however, to suppose that good French cooking necessarily means rich and very complicated dishes. It means a very critical choice of materials, very great cleanliness, and a very careful preparation by processes some of which are long. But it will be found that the methods and the resulting dishes are almost invariably simple, even



and proper purpose of each of which every Frenchwoman understands.

Here we come to the really characteristic thing about French cooking. The French understand herbs and the French understand vegetables. There was a time when we understood herbs in England, or I suppose there must have been, for bibliophiles pay enormous sums for ancient English herbals. We seem to have lost the knowledge that the French still possess to-day. They understand herbs medically. Every Frenchwoman is accustomed to make hot decoctions from the leaves of wild pansy, verbena, lime, eucalyptus, mint, sarsaparilla and camomile, of which the last is perhaps the only one which is still used in England—and that rarely—except as an ingredient in chemist's prescriptions. Every French vegetable garden has a little plot of half a dozen different kinds of herbs, which are used as flavourings for salads, for omelets, and for various cooked dishes. In England mint sauce alone survives. What Englishman has ever learnt to know tarragon or chervil? Who uses laurel leaves or thyme? For the three separate herbs, *civette*, *ciboule* and *ciboulette* there is only one word—chives—in English, and there is none for *sarriette*. We only know fennel and rue because they are mentioned in *Hamlet*, and garlic because it arouses unpleasant olfactory recollections of porters and waiters in Southern Europe.

Above all, the French understand vegetables. They understand the wild vegetables which can be eaten raw, such as dandelion and corn salad. They understand how to grow and how to cook the vegetables of the garden. They also understand how to eat them, pay them the proper compliment of serving them as a separate course, and do not allow them merely to be mixed up with the gravy at the side of a plate of meat. They understand the growing and mixing of salads, and know their uses in clearing the



TASTING THE WINE IN A ROCK Cellar IN JOURNAI



palate at the moment, as well as the blood later on.

Vegetables are the chief ingredient in what I should describe as the most typical of all French dishes. This dish is not frogs and it is not snails. The legs of frogs are tender morsels, but they are only rarely seen. Edible snails, served very hot in butter and highly flavoured with garlic, are more common, but they are not a food. The most typical of French dishes is not any kind of fish either, though the French make a delicacy of the rock lobsters, which we neglect and they import from Cornwall and Ireland, though they serve deliciously such fish as shad and bass and brill and hake and burbot and skate, all of which we either despise or do not know, and though *bouillabaisse* is the glory of Marseilles and the French Mediterranean coast.

The dish is not *poulet Marengo*, though that method of cooking a chicken piecemeal in oil, with tomatoes and garlic and brandy, has become historic since Napoleon's cook, Dunan, improvised it after the battle, when the Emperor suddenly called for food, and these were the only materials to be obtained.

It is not even the omelet, though that dish is French enough; but the omelet belongs to other countries also, or at least it is made in other countries.

What is made nowhere but in France is *la soupe*. It may have beef in it and be a *pot au feu*. It may be made with chicken and be a *petite marmite*. The liquid of it may be milk, and it is a *soupe au lait*. What it always contains, however, and of what it very often exclusively consists is vegetables, and that is what makes French *soupe* so radically different from English soup or German *suppe*. Vegetable soup is the true French national dish. To most French workmen, indeed, and to all French soldiers, the very words '*la soupe*' stand, not only for the dish, but for the whole of the meal, so typical

is it of the whole meal. In the winter, potatoes and leeks will be its basis—*la soupe aux poireaux*—or it may be made with lentils or with dried haricot beans or with onions, in which case it will also include cheese. According to the season it may be made with sorrel or spinach, or water-cress, or peas, or, indeed, any other vegetable, but vegetables of some sort it must have. It may be taken at midday, as they do in the north, or at the end of the day's work, as in most of the rest of the country; but a day without *la soupe* in France would be unthinkable. *La soupe* is the national dish.

Of course it might be argued that bread is the national dish, for the Frenchman eats more bread than any other European. It used to be said that you could always tell a Frenchman at a foreign table d'hôte, because he wore a decoration in his buttonhole, asked three times for bread, and knew nothing at all about geography. However, if the Frenchman eats a lot of bread, we do all of us eat some, and many of us do not eat soup.

Perhaps one reason why we do not often eat soup in England is that unless it is merely made by mixing something out of a jar or out of a packet with hot water, the preparation of it, as we understand it, is such an elaborate and costly business. Soup would not be so universal a dish as it is in France if it had to be prepared according to the recipes to be found in English cookery-books.

If it were necessary to prove that every Frenchman really cares for the refinements of food and cooking, it would be sufficient to point to the many local dishes which every part of the country can show, and to the local cheeses, of which there must be hundreds of varieties, made with goat's milk or ewe's milk as well as with cow's milk, and ranging from the strongly smelling *cancoyote* of the Franche Comté or the *livarot* of Normandy to the delicately





